

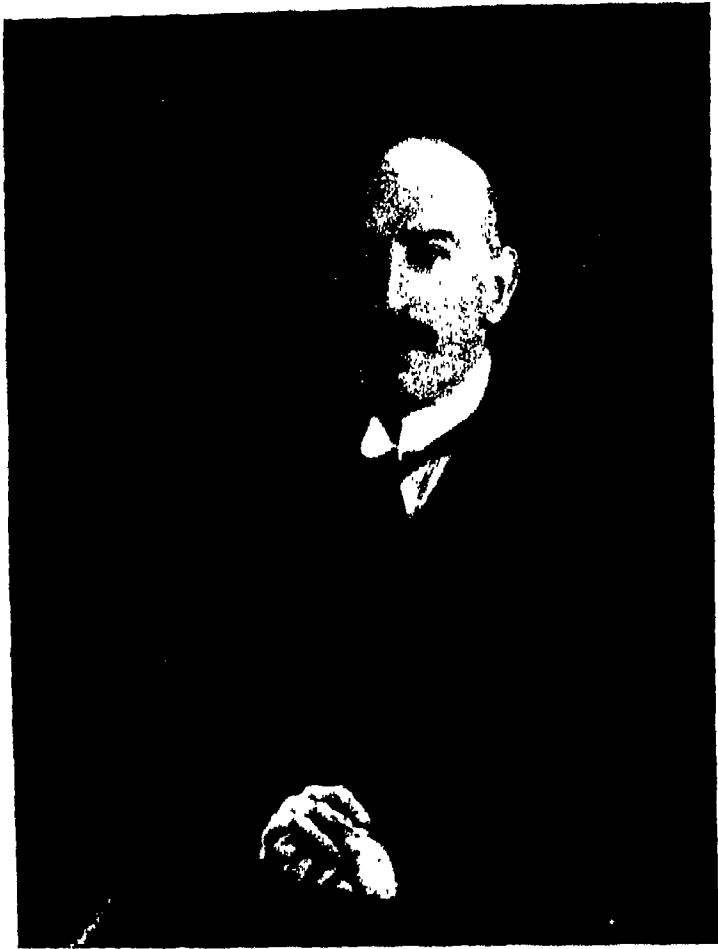
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MAURICE BARING



Maurice Baring.

(Photo: Bertrams Park)

MAURICE BARING

BY

ETHEL SMYTH



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PREFACE

IN a preface written by Mr. Belloc to one of Maurice Baring's books he declares that "no one ever reads prefaces"; and as few things are more exhilarating than to differ from people you greatly admire and revere, it is a pleasure to express total disagreement with that statement. Myself I always read a preface, and not infrequently enjoy it more than what follows—the reason being that prefaces are generally delicate boostings—what are called "blurbs"—written by Great Authorities; and Great Authorities sometimes have such very queer tastes.

In this case, the whole book being by the same hand from cover to cover except where quotational liberties have been taken with Baring's works, there is no danger of raising false hopes, but I should like to say how it came to be written at all.

* * * * *

Some time ago, recovering from illness, and noticing, as so often before, that among the books able to hold the languid attention of a convalescent are the novels of Maurice Baring, I began trying to discover the secret of this quality which he shares with Tolstoy, Proust, and a few others. Shortly afterwards, an intelligent and literary young Frenchman, who turned out to be an impassioned admirer of Baring, told me that in France he is considered one of the leading novelists of the day. Whereupon with great difficulty I procured a number of new and old French reviews, the tone of which would shock those whose idea of criticism is coolness and caution. Yet we cannot afford to turn up our noses at literary France, and though many of our own critics, notably Mr. Desmond MacCarthy—profoundest and most sensitive of them all—have done justice to a manner not much cultivated among our writers of fiction, the French seem to tumble instinctively to a straightforward, unflowered style of narrative,

PREFACE

which, to my mind, drives home the contrast between the cruelty of Destiny and the serene indifference of Nature with singular force.

Again not one of these reviewers, I think, but drew attention to a quality summed up in the remark of Baring's friend Mrs. Cornish, that in his brain is a little silver filter which lets through nothing but the truth, so that as you read you find yourself constantly exclaiming: "Yes! life is like that!" While writing these words, Audrey's sly query in *As You Like It* as to whether poetry is "a true thing" has stolen unbidden into the writer's mind. It is an open question how many people enjoy the presentment of truth without frills and flummery; but if every time he takes up his pen, a novelist proves that anyhow *prose* can be "a true thing," it surely is a great achievement?

Another thing which struck me about these reviews, was, that the qualities singled out for special praise—among them knowledge of the human heart, unique culture and an ingrained horror of italics and overstatement—are precisely those which explain the hold Baring has on his admirers here.

As may be imagined, the last-mentioned trait appealed greatly to Latins; "pudique réserve" one of them called it, which was rendered in my script by an interim typist "pedigree reserve."

But most of all did it please me that at least three of Baring's eulogists, MM. Chardonne, Maurois, and M. Charles de Bos, who wrote the Preface to the French translation of *Cat's Cradle*, speak of the way that in this author's novels tragedy steps noiselessly onto the scene exactly as it does in real life, and has the victim in its grip before anyone realises what is happening.

It was curious to discover, as one read, that so high an estimate is based on the sole acquaintance with four or five of the novels. Of what preceded them, which includes some of the most brilliant specimens of his art, nothing whatever is known across the Channel. And I confess that simultaneously with a desire to bring home the astounding diversity of this author to his own countrymen, the temerarious idea intruded itself that some day the revolving stage may slew round in the direction of France, and

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through the offices of a good translator, the present writer be privileged to introduce to his French appreciators Baring the poet, the playwright, the essayist, the reviewer, the reliable historian of Russia of the past, and the Unreliable Historian* of all countries and all epochs, who has wisely handled his subject matter in a region of fantasy where time has no power to corrode.

* * * * *

This then, was the inception of the present venture, and since a complete edition of Baring's works is now available, it seemed time that someone should attempt an all-round appreciation. I will only say here that the impression made on me by each successive work, as it appeared, has deepened, now that with riper judgment than that of relatively salad days one contemplates his whole output spread out before the eyes like a coloured contour map.

Remains the question how best to accomplish this self-imposed task. It should be easy to make a thumbnail sketch of one whose march through the years you have watched with interest for half a lifetime. But a faithful portrait, with background and avocations complete—no less than which will be attempted here—is, as His Majesty King William IV would have put it, "quite another thing . . . quite another thing"—not to speak of what will be, to the best of one's ability, a serious analysis of his whole contribution to literature.

* * * * *

Years ago I knew a London hostess whose delightful parties were generally besprinkled with personalities of intellectual or artistic eminence. And if, at one of her humbler gatherings, a greatly daring guest should profess admiration for an outsider—that is for one not yet stamped with the Government Seal of that particular "petit clan"—she would listen awhile patiently, and at last say with gentle finality: "But, you know, *the real people* don't consider So-and-So a painter at all!" (or a writer, or a

* One of Baring's later books is called *Unreliable History*.

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philosopher as the case might be). Some used to wonder who the "real people" were, though if you knew the house you could make a shrewd guess; but that rather irritating phrase of hers is now haunting me, and I think with envy of certain "real people" in this particular line of literature—people like Messrs. Duff Cooper, E. F. Benson, and Harold Nicolson, for instance! . . .

The personality to be dealt with being curious and utterly untypical, perhaps one might begin by dislocating a hackneyed phrase and affirming that "l'homme c'est le style"; after which, enough of the human being can be painted in to carry the artist, who is of course our chief concern.

In the following so-called biographical section, which, like *The Puppet Show of Memory*, goes only to the year 1914, Baring's books will merely be mentioned on their birthday, to be dealt with later on. But in one case an exception will be made. Despite its reticence, *The Puppet Show*, which is not an autobiography but a collection of memories, is more emphatically "l'homme" than anything others can say about him. This book will therefore be taken in the present writer's biographical stride; incidents to which there is no reference in the semi-autobiographical Russian books will be quoted from it, also passages of exceptional interest or beauty which reinforce one's own random affirmations. Otherwise the above plan will be adhered to.

As final prefatory word, be it said that this is the book of an admirer, though not, one hopes, of a blind one. But a wise man and recognised authority—(in the course of writing these pages the exact reference will be looked up)—has declared that none but those who love an artist's work are capable of judging it comprehensively. In view of which comfortable pronouncement the reader shall be spared hypocritical apologies for the probable trend of this study!

PART I

BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE DOWN TO 1914

I

HIS DESCENT—ETON—‘MAURICIANA’—CAMBRIDGE— DESCRIPTION OF HIM AS YOUTH

I HAVE known him of whom I write for over forty years—that is since 1893, when he was a boy of nineteen—yet only learned the other day from the pages of a little French biography* that the root from which sprang so much distinction and so many coronets was not an obscure but gifted Jewish financier such as in the 'nineties was considered the inevitable founder of every big banking house, but a Lutheran Pastor, Frantz Baring of Bremen. It is unnecessary to run through the roster of this holy man's descendants, who between 1650 and 1874 (the year of Maurice Baring's birth) were contributing in various ways to the efficiency of the British Empire. But it should be noted that the author's father, the first Lord Revelstoke, and two of his uncles, Mr. Thomas Baring (also a banker) and Lord Cromer, were classical scholars in the profoundest sense of the word; a taste passed on not only to Maurice Baring, but to his elder brother Cecil, afterwards third Lord Revelstoke, who was also very musical—which, in its early stages, the wireless was not. After dinner, therefore, instead of turning it on, or poring over the latest detective novel, or fluttering the pages of four evening papers, this scholarly banker would put his feet on the chimney piece and read Homer.

It was their mother, née Bulteel, who brought into the family a passion for things artistic, especially for music and painting; also, according to her sister Lady Ponsonby, wife of Sir Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria's Private Secretary, an inflexible tenacity of purpose supposed to be characteristic of the other branch of their mother's family—the Greys. As time went on,

* *Maurice Baring*, by Louis Chaigne.

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all were surprised to see this trait cropping up in Maurice; sometimes it is true, in the shape of incredible obstinacy, but also as the iron quality without which no one gets anywhere. Surprised, because, in his early days, tearing spirits combined with what appeared to be an easy smiling irresponsibility caused many to look on him as a lovable and gifted lunatic. For instance, before I knew him I was told that when Lady Ponsonby, to whom he was deeply attached and who was devoted to him, once remarked, "I don't think I like you in *pince-nez*; must you really wear them?" his reply was: "I won't, if you don't like them, darling," and forthwith they were flung into the fire; an act of violence that did not commend itself to his aunt, who was apt for some time afterwards to say, "I wish Maurice didn't think it amusing to shy his *pince-nez* into the fire." So much for an unfortunately selected proof of devotion!

He was educated at Eton, and though his aunt knew that her friend Arthur Benson, then a house-master there, had high hopes of his future from all points of view, I remember her carefully-veiled surprise on learning that yet another revered friend, Mrs. Cornish, wife of the Vice-Provost of Eton—among whose gifts was an X-ray intuition as to character—had been heard referring to "Maurice's sweet reasonableness."

None of his intimates played a greater part on the Eton scene than those lifelong friends, who are so often mentioned in *The Puppet Show of Memory*, and of whom he has drawn such living portraits in the Eton chapter of his *Lost Lectures*—particularly of Mrs. Cornish, "whose friendship," he says, "was to be one of the most precious assets of my life."

The minds of the Cornish children are stocked with *Mauriciana*, which partly explains the bond that seems always to have existed between him and children. Once when he was taking a handful of them to the pantomime in one of the rickety old third-class carriages of the very earliest 'nineties, the treat-master put his hand into his pocket, took out some golden half-sovereigns—for in those happy days there were such things—and dropped them, slowly, one after the other, through a chink between the boards

EARLY DAYS

onto the line. The children are said to have nearly gone off their heads with excitement and horror.

Another time, when Cecilia, the youngest of the family, aged five, was told to go up at once to the schoolroom where her elder sister was waiting to give her her lessons, Baring flew upstairs on tiptoe, quietly turned the key, and whirled the child off to see the sights of Eton—a jaunt that lasted all afternoon and culminated in a sumptuous tea at the pastrycook's.

I think the docility and virtuousness of that particular child, now Lady Fisher, must have keyed her friend up to specially brilliant efforts of suggestion. One day she amazed her family by committing one small crime after the other, and being so tiresome altogether that her mother fancied she must be sickening for a serious illness. The explanation was that Maurice had given her five shillings to be "as naughty as possible."

As for one of his favourite turns at the Cornish's river-picnics for children, jumping into the Thames with all his clothes on, this appears to have been an occasional but irresistible impulse all down his life. Anyhow one has heard of it happening at Brighton, Killarney, Seville, and Copenhagen—and by no means always in hot weather. Perhaps Pastor Frantz Baring of Bremen was a cold-water-cure clergyman, like the Bavarian priest Pastor Kneipp of Wörishofen, inventor of the Kneipp Cure,* and this may have been an hereditary trait. But one of Baring's greatest friends to be, Countess Sophie Benckendorff, said that these eccentricities merely proved how right she was in declaring, after a very short acquaintance, that he was a "Troll"—that is, a being on the borderland between humanity and fairyland who plays a great part in Scandinavian and Russian folk-lore.

Years of course tone down exuberance, though in Baring's case the toning down proceeded very slowly. But to revert to Mrs. Cornish and her praise of his "sweet reasonableness," long before time had done its fell work the trait was there. It is often so. Many fly-away spirits, who seem to be all impulse, are often

* *Impressions That Remained*, by B. S., II., 111.

listening privately to a still small voice within. In the same way, how many people one has known, who, judging by the aspect of the room they work in, are hopelessly untidy, but who can put their hand on what they want in half a second.

* * * * *

Baring's literary bent had revealed itself early. Twice when at Eton he had caused little booklets of his poems to be printed for his mother, and he has told us that when in 1891 he carried off the Prince Consort's French prize his joy was almost overwhelming. The financial crisis in Baring Brothers that so nearly ended in a great disaster occurred during his last year at school, and as he was destined for the diplomatic career, the next move was a series of sojourns on the Continent, the object of which was intensive study of foreign languages. During one of these he wrote an amazing little collection of *pastiches* of four celebrated French authors, Pierre Loti, Paul Bourget, Ernest Renan and Anatole France; and in honour of the town in which his German studies had been pursued, this booklet was entitled *Hildesheim*. Later on it was published in Paris at the advice of the poet Henri de Régnier, who, commenting on the delicate sense of the French language possessed by this Englishman, remarked that none of the four authors could have written pages more emphatically himself.

Throughout all these early years Baring had been lying a-soak in a bath of poetry whose waters were fed by every available source from Aristophanes to Swinburne; and in 1893 it was obvious that his heart was less set on blossoming into an Ambassador than on becoming a great poet. In the year 1894 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and though in those days our acquaintance was but slight, occasional anecdotes related by his cousins the Ponsonbys confirmed one's own first impressions of his quality.

I remember being told, for instance, that one evening, crossing the quadrangle, someone clapped him heartily on the back with a loud "Hullo, old chap!" Turning round he found himself

confronted with an unknown Indian undergraduate who apologised with polite embarrassment. "I mistook you for Mr. Godavery," he stammered. "But I *am* Mr. Godavery," replied Baring calmly. Unfortunately the scene had no sequel, for shortly afterwards, owing to grievous incapacity to do the simplest sums in arithmetic, let alone mathematics, Baring came to grief over the Little-go, and Cambridge knew him no more.

Then followed five years of arduous effort to pass into the diplomatic service in spite of this handicap. At slack moments he often came down to my cottage near Frimley, and being more musical than he has ever had an idea of, no one was more welcome, nor could any composer desire a more appreciative listener. He always knew what one was aiming at, and if you were singing to him would pick out the supreme phrase in a song as infallibly as in a poem, explaining always that he didn't really know anything about music!

In the early 'nineties, he was a long rather lanky youth, and though powerfully built must have been very flexible, judging by his passion for sitting on the floor rather than on chairs and sofas. I don't think he ever quite shook off this habit; some seven years later Vernon Lee the author, who had made his acquaintance in Rome, said to a friend of mine: "One loves him all the more because there are little things to forgive; a nervous laugh, a tendency to lie on the carpet and suck his boot, etcetera"; which my friend called "a brave and happy foreshortening." Another habit which, alas, did not cling to him, was growing hair on the top of his head; but at that time he had a plentiful crop, and his eyes were, as they still are, young, and fresh.

Of Baring as bicyclist I have very special memories. This "sport," practically started by the invention of the pneumatic tyre, was at first considered vulgar for men and immodest for women. But now Society with a big S had taken it up, and as it was cheap and convenient, Baring, though by no means wholly indifferent to what his Aunt Lady Ponsonby called the "qu'en dira-t-on," had perhaps cycled before it became a fashionable fad. Anyhow, he often appeared at my cottage on his bike, with

night gear and toothbrush tied on somehow, and a more dangerous companion on wheels cannot be imagined; for in the heat of argument he would make wild swoops in your direction, and only by violent wrenchings and desperate feats of agility stave off disaster at the eleventh hour.

If anyone asks what he was like in other respects, I can only say, that just now, the sight of a puppy tearing madly round and round this house conjured up simultaneously two memories: one of *Baring Jeune*, the other of a song of Schubert's I had not thought of for years, called *Delphine*, which expresses the divine exuberance of youth as even Schubert has not expressed it elsewhere. True, in the song the cause of this wild up-surge is Love, but it's all the same thing!

Youthful exuberance, however, was not the whole story, and though, as I said, the eyes were strikingly young and fresh, they were something else besides. Most human beings are called upon to hide sorrow behind a smiling mask, and perhaps the heart of a poet is fuller of tragedy than other hearts. But for poets there is a way out. Goethe makes his Tasso say that whereas anguish often strikes ordinary mortals dumb, to the poet it is given to say how he suffers. So we need not altogether pity such a one for the sorrow in his eyes!

* * * * *

The above is merely a fugitive impression of Baring as a boy of nineteen or twenty; but no one has been more faithful to himself than he, and those who know him to-day can very well imagine what he was like then.

II

EXAMINATIONS—OXFORD—ENTERS DIPLOMACY

To pursue him across the map during those five years passed in cramming for examinations, being spun in arithmetic, and starting again, is giddy work; France, Germany, London, Italy, Germany again, back to London, Italy again, and so on. And in all these places he was too busy learning geography, arithmetic, and endless obscure technical terms in three languages—or, if you include English, four—to think of literary ambitions that the atmosphere of Cambridge had damped down for the time being. You are only given three chances of entering the diplomatic service, and though the standard of arithmetic demanded was elementary, he had twice failed to reach it!

One fact he quotes illustrates the foolishness of the examination system. His German crammer declared he could have sent a German Essay of Baring's to a German magazine, but inasmuch as he did not know the German for "belligerent" he was beaten by others who had far less knowledge of the language. And in the French paper the same thing happened to this Englishman who, according to Henri de Régnier, wrote French like a Frenchman! How anyone can ever have considered such a system satisfactory is a mystery.

Meanwhile the present writer, who had by then made friends with various members of Baring's family, remembers hearing rumours of his harum-scarum ways, of bills, of the putting together of heads in consultation and so on. A factor in his expenditure of which, of course, no one ever heard, were acts of generosity quite out of proportion to his means, and in the early 'nineties, quite by chance, I heard of two such. Ingrained characteristics are apt to persist in after-life, and this was an

inherited trait. Of his father the son writes: "He had a contempt for half-measures and liked people to do the big thing on a large scale. 'So-and-so,' he used to say, 'has behaved well'; that meant, had been big and free-handed and above small and mean considerations."

The pages about his father are among the most delightful in his *Memoirs*, and having been told four decades ago what a remarkable and charming woman Lady Revelstoke had been, and how her children had adored her, I once asked her son why he had not given us a similar portrait of his mother? The reply was . . . a pause, and then three words, "*because I couldn't*." French reviewers are for ever commenting on the reticence with which he handles deep emotions; I have often reflected that those three words, "*because I couldn't*," can serve as a good key to a soul.

To return to his Laocoon-like wrestlings with examiners; after failure No. 2, considering it useless to go back to either his London or his foreign crammers, he came to the conclusion, on "sweet reasonableness" lines, that he was over-crammed—a condition in which not even a Strasbourg goose can do itself justice—and decided, at the suggestion of Mr. Auberon Herbert, afterwards Lord Lucas, a new acquaintance who afterwards became one of his greatest friends, to take rooms at Oxford, where, but for not being subject to College authority, his life was that of an undergraduate. Particularly as regards parties (see *The Puppet Show of Memory*, p. 171), which a former guest recently described: people climbing in and out of windows, missiles of all sorts flying (including syphons) and in the midst of it all Donald Tovey carefully explaining counterpoint to a Rugger Blue.

His rooms were above a chemist's shop and I heard he was apt to slip down and pose as an assistant, pressing a mustard plaster on a customer who had asked for cough lozenges, while murmuring: "We are selling a good many of these just now for catarrh." When not helping the chemist in this manner he went to coaches for Latin and arithmetic, and in pursuit of his laudable intention to rest his brain, he did a certain amount of visiting in

the county. A man who had been one of a large week-end party informed me that Baring was to have been among the guests, and at tea-time he duly rode up on his bicycle. As it happened, most of them were on the front door-steps, but instead of dismounting he swept off his hat, circled round a grass plot, and disappeared for ever down the drive. Perhaps he thought the company looked too clever for one in a state of mental debility, but as far as my informant knew, the mystery was never cleared up.

Meanwhile, if little work was being done, he was perhaps more profitably engaged, making some wonderful friendships (with Hilaire Belloc, for instance) and rediscovering English literature. It was what he called an interlude of perfect happiness. In the chapter of *The Puppet Show* called "Oxford and Germany" is what one imagines must be a singularly faithful picture of University life as lived by a certain type of young Englishman. And without knowing anything about it I am equally convinced that another passage in this chapter hits the nail of a much-discussed subject plumb on the head. Describing his life at Oxford he says: "It was like being at Eton again. Indeed, I never could see any difference between Eton and Balliol. Balliol seemed to me an older edition of Eton, whereas Cambridge was to me a slightly different world—different in kind although in many ways like Oxford. And although neither of them know it, and each would deny it vehemently, they are startlingly like each other all the same." Of course it is not everybody who has been at both Universities, but even if they had, I fancy this detachment—a mixture of softness and acuteness of judgment concerning subjects usually distorted by the prism of bias—is among Maurice Baring's rare characteristics.

In the summer of 1897 Lord Revelstoke died, just too soon to see his son over the harbour bar, for in the spring of 1898 the final examination was at last tackled with success. Years afterwards the French examiner M. Roche told him that as a matter of fact he had once more failed in arithmetic; but M. Roche informed the Board that his French essay might have been written by a

Frenchman, whereupon they gave him half marks in arithmetic. He had rather suspected that those half marks must have been a free gift, for, later on, comparing his answers with those of other successful candidates, he found they in no way coincided. Evidently the system had its good points.

III

PARIS—"GEPAK"—ECCENTRICITIES—DREYFUS—MR. R. BALFOUR
—RELIGION—INTERNATIONAL LAW EXAMINATION

AFTER a short spell at the Foreign Office, in January 1899, he was sent to Paris and began his diplomatic career as unpaid attaché. The Paris chapter in *The Puppet Show* contains, among other things, a striking portrait of Mr. Reginald Lister—"an artist in life and the organisation of life" who was then head of the Chancery; an absolutely brilliant letter from Vernon Lee in which the methods of Wagner and the causes of his popular appeal are analysed;* an unforgettable thumbnail sketch of his Ambassador, Sir Edmund Monson—"academic, with a large swaying presence and an inexhaustible supply of polished periods"; and a record of his own initiation into Racine on whom later he was to write such a remarkable essay.†

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At this time, when, as for many years to come, money was an acute consideration, Baring was already addicted to the expensive craze of constructing anthologies for himself by the simple process of cutting favourite poems out of hundreds of books and periodicals and pasting them in admirably bound manuscript books. As years went on he must have destroyed the equivalent of a large library in the process—a thought that will not have troubled him at all.

He used to call the result of this system his *Gepäck* (luggage) and generally had two sizes running, named respectively *Heavy Luggage* and *Light Luggage*; and when a volume became complete,

* This letter and Baring's reply are given, pp. 208-10.

† In *The Punsb and Judy Show*.

it was given away and a new one started.* Countess Benckendorff once said that a maker of *Gepäck* must get rid of "le respect humain," and this condition was certainly complied with by Baring, who would as readily snip eight lines of poetry out of a two-guinea book belonging to his father's library as cut a sixpenny pamphlet of his own into ribbons.

The other day I was discussing him with an old and valued friend of his who said it was less that he was really extravagant than that ordinary ideas as to the value of things and the importance of money refused to lodge in his brain—a distinction one readily allows, though the result is much the same! He gives, as instance, that when they were travelling together through Germany in an express train, a new and very expensive overcoat of Maurice's could no longer be persuaded to get into his hold-all. Whereupon he opened the window and flung it out on to the line, continuing the conversation as if nothing had happened.

A similar spirit of impatient recklessness determined his relation to his own collection of books. Up to quite recent times his life was punctuated by frequent changes of domicile, and on each of these occasions he got rid of his carefully selected library and started a new one on empty shelves; "so much simpler," he would say. I once found and indignantly purchased at a second-hand bookshop a rather precious volume of Sappho, which, after inscribing it in suitably affectionate and appreciative terms, I had laid at his feet. His reply to sarcastic comments on a postcard was that this book must have got by mistake into the last lot of doomed volumes and that he had been vainly looking for it for ages. Which may or may not have been true.

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His connection with the newspapers now began. He had the luck to witness the *première* of Rostand's *Aiglon*, with Sarah Bernhardt in the title rôle, and sent the *Speaker* a description of what was one of the greatest stage triumphs that has ever in-

* While writing these lines, his latest book: *Have You Anything to Declare?*—a fine specimen of *Grosse Gepäck* with comments by the compiler—has appeared.

flamed a capital. Part of that article and many other interesting things are in the Paris chapter, but of an exploit of his, related to me by our mutual friend, Madame Bulteau, there is no mention; and though, when I reminded him of it recently, his memory refused to function, he admits that the anecdote bears the stamp of truth. A pint pot won't hold more than a pint, and no doubt his life at this epoch was too richly sown with similar episodes for his brain to register them all.

Just then the Dreyfus affair was convulsing Paris, and foreigners, particularly diplomats, were adjured to observe extremest discretion—which should have been easy for Maurice who had no settled convictions on the subject. The form, however, his discretion took was to walk straight through a restaurant one evening—in at one door and out of another—vociferating “Vive Dreyfus!”—an act of audacity which so paralysed everyone present that not a word of protest was uttered.

* * * * *

Before he left Paris a Cambridge friend of his, Mr. Reggie Balfour, came to see him, informed him that he desired to become a member of the Church of Rome, and took him to Low Mass at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. Apparently Baring was not conscious, so far, of any leaning towards Roman Catholicism, but he tells us that this ceremony, which he had never seen before, greatly impressed him. Short and extremely simple, it made him think of the catacombs and the meetings of the Early Christians. Finally he said to his friend: “My trouble is that I cannot believe in the first proposition, the source of all dogma. If I could do that, if I could tell the first lie, I quite see that all the rest would follow.”

But if unconscious so far of any leaning towards Rome, and though, as he tells us, he had long since lost his religious faith as easily as a child loses its first teeth, the problem must always have been at the back of his mind and a subject of discussion between us. For instance, in a letter from Paris dated “Jan. 4th,

5th or 6th," 1900, (p. 185), there is a paragraph beginning: "I wish we were all born Roman Catholics." And in another letter, written ten years after his conversion, he wrote to me as follows: "Once in your life you gave proof with regard to me of miraculous intuition. You told me one day when we were bicycling somewhere near One Oak—it must have been about 1900—that you felt sure I would become a Catholic some day. At that moment I felt, though *je ne demandais pas mieux*, that nothing was more impossible."

But his mood on the subject fluctuated more than once. A year or two after that bicycle ride—about 1902, it must have been—he said he had gone straight through the question and had come out the other side, and was certain it could never be his way any more than it could be mine. His contention was, if my memory does not deceive me, that if you acknowledge the Virgin Mary you must acknowledge Parthenos, the Virgin Goddess; that Apollo, Pan, Zeus and Vishnu must be in the Pantheon as well as Jehovah, Christ, and the Holy Ghost, all these figures being symbols of an indefinite "Sehnsucht"* and co-equal. I fancy this recollection is pretty accurate, because he referred to Renan's Prayer on the Acropolis as summing up this view to perfection—and Renan had always been (and is) one of my favourite authors.

Oddly enough, however, nothing he ever said, then or later, changed my opinion that one day the step would be taken. I can still see myself seated on a mountain near Briançon in the winter of 1907-8, and hear our mutual friend Harry Brewster saying: "I shouldn't wonder if Baring became a Roman Catholic some day." To which my reply was: "I shouldn't wonder if he is one already." As we know, it happened just a year later.

If I permit myself this digression it is because, as he himself remarks somewhere, when an Anglican becomes a Roman Catholic, friends and acquaintance are apt to say: "Oh, no doubt he was got hold of by the priests!" This may sometimes be the case, but what I wish to show is that there were always two natural

* Longing.

1900

PARIS

bents in Baring: one towards the literary life, the other towards Roman Catholicism.

* * * * *

To go back to Paris, in the summer of 1900, he once more submitted himself to Torture by Examination, and the subject was International Law. He thinks he failed to answer one single question, and was informed by his crammer that he had not the legal mind—a fact it hardly needed a crammer to discover. Shortly afterwards, the Foreign Office having expressed a wish that he should go to Denmark, he started for Copenhagen, where he became 3rd Secretary to Her Majesty's Legation in August 1900.

IV

COPENHAGEN—SCHEME OF "THE BLACK PRINCE"—VISIT TO
SARAH BERNHARDT—SOSNOFKA

As soon as he had mastered Danish, which he allows was accomplished "fairly quickly," he began mingling with the intelligentsia of Copenhagen; made friends with Dr. George Brandes, one of Denmark's greatest men, saw eye-opening performances of Ibsen, and sailed about with his Minister, Sir Edward Goschen, in Sir Edward's yacht. Once during the Minister's absence, for ten glorious days Baring was *Chargé d'Affaires* and thus had an opportunity of gauging the pellucid character of relations between our Government and their representatives. Continental Foreign Offices may not always deal fairly by their ambassadors (I am thinking specially of Prince Lichnowsky in 1914), but it is soothing to reflect that this cannot possibly happen in a country whose high officials habitually sign their communications to representatives abroad: "Yours with great truth."

I am not writing a detailed memoir of Maurice Baring, who, at least up to 1914, has rendered such an attempt unnecessary, but merely underlining what seem to have been decisive factors in his life; and all but chief among these is certainly his friendship with the Benckendorffs which began at Copenhagen, where Count Benckendorff was then Russian Minister. In one of his letters was a splendid picture of Countess Benckendorff, a sentence in which specially fired his correspondent's imagination: "Her very charm, her sovereign quality is that she is brutally frank without being brutal." In fact, so enthusiastically did Baring write about the whole family that late in the autumn I travelled back to England from Berlin *via* Copenhagen, in order to make an



Maurice Baring listening to the Author singing.
Copenhagen, 1900.
(Reproduced by M.B.'s special desire.)

acquaintanceship which developed into a friendship when Count Benckendorff came to London as Russian Ambassador. Of all the portraits painted in *The Puppet Show* none is more alive and faithful than that of Count Benckendorff.

From Copenhagen I got a letter announcing the conception of his first poetical drama. Letter sections, if well selected, are almost always the most interesting part of almost any book; but aware that many readers skip them on principle, I shall introduce this specimen here, in the main text.

Copenhagen,
February 20th, 1901.

"... In my mind is floating a big theme for a poem, a play which I once told you about; but I am afraid the gift of Expression has for ever deserted me. The vision is there and I would give anything to get a shred of it on paper. It has gone on increasing. The first time I saw it clearly in my mind was when Widor played to us in the gold music-room. I had thought of it before, but then veils seemed to have fled, and it appeared quite simple.

"It is about the Black Prince, you know.

"I do think the subject is magnificent, because this is what happened. The Black Prince after Poitiers, etc., fought a campaign in Spain and came back to Bordeaux, having got a mortal disease—a kind of plague—that slowly sapped his constitution. He lived a long time, and so drank failure to the dregs, and lived to forget himself, and lose his temper, and have the whole garrison of Limoges killed while he was carried on a sofa. When he got back to Bordeaux his son was dead. Then he went to England and got a little better, but all his conquests were taken away. He had zeal for one more Expedition to France and then came back and shut himself up in England, but had one final spurt of zeal to insist on reforms in Parliament, and to get rid of the King Edward III's mistress; then he died.

"My play, if it is a play, would begin after Poitiers, at the splendid barbaric Court at Bordeaux, and there would be the first realisation on his return from Spain, that all the splendid promise was coming to nothing: he would *know* he was finished without the consolation of having died young. He is over 40, when he dies. I think there is pathos here. All his friends die

except one, but I can't find out (there are no books hardly about him) what his wife was like. Perhaps it will be a poem. More likely nothing at all. . . ."

* * * *

In July 1901, Baring stayed a few days with Sarah Bernhardt at her island home off the coast of Brittany; and his description (in *The Puppet Show of Memory*) of her life there as private individual is a revelation to those who only saw her on the stage. Simple, direct, absolutely natural, ready to talk about anything on earth except her business; at times full of bubbling gaiety and spirits; irresistibly comic and a superb mimic, what chiefly struck him was her radiant and ever-present common sense. . . . "There was no nonsense about her; no pose, no posturing."

This passage strikes me as exactly the right preface to the superb study which follows in the next chapter of one who surely must have been as great a genius as ever trod the boards. But during that visit occurred an incident which, of course, could not be related in Sarah's lifetime.

It appears that every afternoon they played tennis on a hard court, and I suspect that Sarah's idea was hygiene and that her form was not that of Wimbledon. As for Maurice I never knew he played at all; but however that might be, as a young Englishman he would of course be roped into the game. Now we all know what miraculous feats are sometimes performed by babes, sucklings, and beginners; how a non-golfer, jeering at the careworn faces and mysterious antics displayed on putting-greens, will carelessly knock a ball into a hole six yards off with his umbrella. What happened that day was that Baring's first serve, delivered with maniacal violence, sped straight for Sarah and hit her on the middle of her chest. . . .

And now ensued the classical stage action when an assassin has attempted the life of the heroine: a piercing shriek, a swaying form caught in the arms of horrified bystanders and laid tenderly on the ground; a series of "Ahl Ahl!" dying away into a terrifying silence. . . . Then the closed eyes gradually open; a faint smile

emboldens the bystanders to raise her carefully and support her off stage . . . and the curtain falls.

When first told this story I remember saying I would gladly sacrifice a year of my life to have witnessed that scene, and could almost say the same to-day! But it is interesting that this absolutely natural, straightforward woman, her wits momentarily scattered by her guest's effort to be up to the mark, instinctively fell back on the appropriate stage action.

* * * * *

At the end of July 1901, came the first of an endless succession of visits to the Benckendorffs' country house in Russia, Sosnofka in the Government of Tambov; and there, instantaneously, Baring fell head over ears in love with the country and its inhabitants. If anyone wants to know how great Russian families lived in the days of *Anna Karenina* let them read his delicious account of the Benckendorffs' country life. So far he did not know one word of Russian, but registered two vows: to learn it immediately, and to return to Russia as soon as he could; and when he got back to Copenhagen he at once began taking lessons from the *psalomsbibik* at the Russian Church—whoever that may be—and the name is suggestive. This was in September, and early in January 1902, came a dispatch to say he had been transferred to Rome, which meant a step up the ladder. But before he left Copenhagen he had written three articles for the new edition of the British Encyclopædia—one on modern French Literature and the other two on Sully Prudhomme and Taine respectively—and nearly finished the manuscript of his first poetical drama, *The Black Prince*.

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V

ROME—HIS FERTILITY AND CULTURE—CHILDREN'S PARTIES—AS
MEMOIRIST—QUITTS DIPLOMACY

I USED to wonder with a touch of indignation, for Rome was my paradise in those days, at the relatively tepid joy manifested by my friend at this transfer.

He has confessed that at that time he did not really like Rome—not at least if you lived there as a diplomat; that he felt as if he were dwelling in a cemetery . . . “oppressed by armies of ghosts in the air, by hosts of memories, by crumbling walls and momentous ruins.” But apart from possible human disappointments, of which even less reticent memoir-writers would drop no hint but which readers have every right to imagine for themselves if they choose, the fundamental cause of his discontent was, probably, that having gradually orientated himself away from diplomacy, he was now facing straight towards literature. And indeed, looking at the volume of work he has put forth in the last thirty-five years, if ever there was a case of a vocation it is Baring's.

At the time he went to Rome I was aware that other articles of his besides those mentioned above had been published, including one on Anatole France, written for *The Yellow Book*—the first review of that author that appeared in English. But studying a certain *Bibliography of First Editions of the Works of Maurice Baring* compiled by Leslie Chaundy and published by Dulan and Co. in 1925, I am amazed to see how much he had written in the 'nineties. Privately printed, a good part of it has been republished—*Hildesheim* and many sonnets, for instance, though not, alas! many of his jokes and parodies, of which more later. And I have a suspicion that all the time he was in Rome

only two ideas possessed him—to break with diplomacy, and to concentrate on Russia.

He went on with his Russian lessons, varying them later with lessons in modern Greek, and made friends with various Russians in Roman Society who furthered his self-education in the literature of their country. Italian, of course, must have been child's play to him, for as Count Benckendorff once said he had a gift that, as a rule, none but infants possess, of learning foreign languages without difficulty.

Little as he may have been enjoying life at Rome, his creative genius, stimulated perhaps by a mounting determination to attend exclusively to its calls in the future, was now more active than ever, his output including a book of poems and four poetical dramas; the now completed *Black Prince*, *Gaston de Foix*, *Dusk*, and *Tristram and Iseult*.

While he stands, as it were, poised for flight into purer air than can be breathed in Embassies, let a few snippets from *The Puppet Show* exhibit a characteristic symptom of what I think is the deepest kind of culture—his knack of carrying you with one flap of his wings out of the present, and landing you gently in the past (or vice-versa, as the case may be); linking up what has been with what is; throwing a bridge across the years and rescuing you from the perhaps not overwhelmingly splendid isolation of your own day.

For instance he is yachting with a friend in Grecian waters, and one evening, after a little talk with a peasant on the Acropolis at Athens (I wonder how many of us, having learned modern Greek for fun, could pass the time of day with a Greek peasant!), he takes out Sappho's *Ode to Aphrodite* and asks the other to read it aloud; "which he did, remarking that it was in *patois*." At Delphi he notices that the type of the famous Charioteer is identical with that of the now rapidly disappearing London hansom-cab driver. Young people of to-day who have never set eyes on these vehicles or their drivers cannot judge how well observed that was. [It would be vain to search classical museums

for the prototype of the chauffeur; only an age of machinery triumphant could have evolved that alert, well-bred countenance!]

Another recollection of Baring's shows the boy as father to the man. Summing up in a paragraph of extreme beauty the magic of the Campagna; of Tivoli, that "divinely elegant" waterfall, now desecrated, practically done away with, in the interests of municipal water-power, he quotes an Ode of Horace (I am not a Latin scholar) beginning *Tibur Argæo* and adds: "That was the first Ode of Horace I ever read when I was up to Arthur Benson in Remove at Eton. I remember wondering at the time what sort of place *Tibur* was, where Horace, tired of journeys by land and by sea, tired of wars and rumours of wars, wished to build himself a final nest." Well for Horace, well for Baring, and, I cannot help adding, well for the present writer, that we saw it before its metamorphosis into the Parish Pump.

In letters from my friend Henry Brewster, author of *The Prison*, who lived at Rome, who delighted in Baring, and whose appreciation of his work was both warm and critical, I find many a snapshot of the poet reading out his dramas, one by one, as soon as they were finished. One snapshot still amuses me greatly. In the course of a little supper party Clotilde Brewster confided to their guests that her father declared himself unable to resist gross flattery for more than two years. "Whereupon," adds Brewster, "Baring said *he* was unable to resist for two minutes! *Che riders!*"

In one letter of Brewster's is a charming picture of a series of Christmas parties in which Baring, a great lover of children, figures to his advantage. Influenza was raging in Rome just then, and while nurses and governesses were on the shelf their charges had untrammelled access to the delicacies of the season. And as a certain young lady celebrated for her firm emission of incontrovertible truths remarked: "You know it's not *Christmas* that makes the children ill; *it's the things they eat.*" All were at their wits' end, till at last kind Mrs. Robert Crawshay took to inviting

derelict infants to tea as often as possible, and Baring, generally of the party, would play charades with these rather peevish convalescents, one of whom was Mrs. Crawshay's own little boy. All refused toys, cakes, and other consolations when the magician was not there, and when he was, the whole band, from two to fourteen years of age, would not sit anywhere but on his knees and shoulders, while such nurses and governesses as were still extant stood around, gaping in admiration.

So idyllic, so moving is this picture, that it is quite a relief to remember the *Maurician*a supplied on pages 2 and 3 by members of the Cornish family. Lady Fisher thinks that probably history was repeating itself at these tea-parties, had the nurses and governesses only guessed it!

Those who are tempted to make indiscreet guesses respecting other preoccupations, human and divine, that run like a stream of molten lava through the path-finding years of all poets, must needs turn to their works, where, in all probability, self-portraits sketched in *Memoirs* are completed in decent anonymity. But in the Roman chapter of *The Puppet Show* one hint is given—the translation of a majestic and terrible *Dirge of the Dead* by Alexis Tolstoy, the refrain of each strophe of which is: "Receive O Lord Thy departed servant into Thy happy dwelling place."* He tells us this poem affected him "like a land-mark and an eye-opener" in his literary travels; and even in translation I fancy it will haunt many who read it. It is a gracious feature of *The Puppet Show* that throughout its 450 pages gems of this kind are constantly, as it were, flicked across the table to us in such a casual manner that, but for knowing what agony and bloody sweat go to the fashioning of a work of art you would swear you have come into their possession by a happy accident!

* * * * *

Lingering over Baring's final months in Italy you feel like one standing on the quay, making conversation with friends on a steamer that may start any moment. But ere with hurried gait

* See *Have You Anything to Declare?*

and stopped-up ears you respond to the hints of the hooter, one pregnant episode must be mentioned.

In Paris, Baring had felt for the first time the strong, simple, and, for that reason, trebly mystical pull of Low Mass, and was reminded of the Early Christians and the Catacombs. Another picture was shown him in Rome. Here he experienced and describes the shattering effect of High Mass at St. Peter's when the Pope blessed the crowd; how, at the Elevation of the Host, the Papal guard went down on one knee and their halberds struck the marble floor with one sharp thunderous rap, and presently the silver trumpets rang out in the dome. At that moment he looked up and his eye caught the inscription written in large letters all round it: "Tu es Petrus." He tells us that, as in Paris, he felt no sympathy with the Catholic Church, "but," he adds, "that ceremony would have impressed anyone." I can well believe it.

Once you begin quoting from *The Puppet Show* it is hard to stop. But all I am trying to do is to give such as have not read it some idea of what seems to me the main charm of the book . . . an extraordinary richness of temperament, revealed, page after page, in language of what, in my own mind, I always call "Baringesque simplicity"—an easy frictionless style which, speaking of his poetry, Henry Brewster used to describe as "sailing in the blue." What seems aimed at both in prose and poetry to-day is obscurity; but Baring's language, as indeed his meaning, is always crystal-clear, and for that reason I think it will never age . . . or, to use the current word, "date."

In the summer of 1902 once more he went to Sosnofka, by which time he could understand and read Russian without difficulty and talk it "enough to get on"; and being now quite determined to give up the diplomatic career, as first step he applied for a temporary exchange into the Foreign Office. There he worked throughout the summer of 1903, and went back to Russia in the autumn, after which he asked to be put *en disponibilité* for six months—in other words, said good-bye to diplomacy and set about finding a door into the promised land of literature.

VI

GOES TO MOSCOW—IN MANCHURIA AS WAR CORRESPONDENT—
THE CHINESE—VIEWS ON WAR

As far as I remember, this decision considerably fluttered the home dove-cot; nor can one expect families to display enthusiasm when a younger member, whose education for a career in which his prospects were excellent has cost a good deal of time and money, throws it up after less than four years in favour of another, his qualifications for which they are not in a position to judge. The plays being not yet printed, all he had to show were a collection of poems and a few articles; and a further reason for lack of warmth in family comment on this *volte-face* was perhaps that, among letters that passed between the Continent and England just then may have been reminders, to attend to which his assets were inadequate. Yet such was the energy with which he tackled the situation that before long pessimistic forecasts died a natural death.

* * * * *

Early in 1904 he went to Russia and installed himself with a family in Moscow, worked hard at Russian, and revelled in the performances of the Art Theatre, being completely carried away by the genius of Chekhov. *The Cherry Orchard*, so he tells us, exactly sums up the life and mood of pre-revolutionary Russia; a whole people "dancing on the top of a volcano which is already heaving and rumbling with the faint noise of the coming convulsion."

The Russo-Japanese war was the beginning of this convulsion, and at the end of April he set off for Manchuria as War Correspondent to the *Morning Post*, knowing, as he remarks, nothing

about journalism and still less about war. Nevertheless, he contrived to get his first dispatch through, and, what is more, uncensored, long before any of his colleagues had succeeded in launching theirs. He performed this feat at Irkutsk, eight days' journey from Moscow, by presenting the guard of the train with his pocket-knife and persuading him to "post a letter" as soon as he got back to Moscow. "There was not much war news in it," he says, "in fact it contained a long and detailed account of a performance of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* at the Art Theatre, Moscow." (I believe this was the first time England had even heard of Chekhov, who had died that year soon after the first performance of *The Cherry Orchard*.)

On the way to Manchuria he crossed Lake Baikal, and there is a page in *The Puppet Show* which I should like to quote, because whenever I come across those two words, Lake Baikal, particularly on a map, back comes the thrill with which I first read the following paragraphs:

"The lake was frozen and was crossed daily by two large ice-breakers which ploughed through three feet of melted ice. The passage lasted four hours. The spectacle when we started was marvellous. It had been a glorious day. The sun in the pure frozen sky was like a fiery, red, Arctic ball. Before us stretched an immense sheet of ice, powdered with snow and spotless except for a long brown track which had been made by the sledges. On the far-off horizon a low range of mountains disappeared in a veil of snow made by the low-hanging clouds. The mountains were intensely blue; they glistened like gems in the cold air and we seemed to be making for some mysterious island, some miraculous reef of sapphires. Towards the west there was another and more distant range, where the intense blue faded into a delicate and transparent sea-green—the colour of the seas round the Greek islands—and these hills were like a phantom continuation of the larger range, as unearthly and filmy as a mirage.

"As we moved, the steamer ploughed the ice into flakes which leaped and were scattered into fantastic spiral shapes and flowers of ice and snow. As the sun sank lower the strangeness and the beauty increased. A pink halo crept over the sky round the sun, which became more fiery and metallic. Some lines from

Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* came into my head which exactly fitted the scene:

And now there came both mist and snow
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast high, came floating by
As green as emerald.

"As the sun set the whole sky became pink, and the distant mountains were like ghostly caverns of ice."

* * * * *

If this passage—and there are many such in these memoirs—bites into your memory, it is because you feel that it is not a "purple patch" but a supreme moment in nature witnessed by one who, as poet, is able to make us see what he saw, and bring back to us pale reflections of Coleridge's terrible vision, set of course in a different and humbler key; perhaps some half-forgotten experience that came to us once on a sleepless night in an Alpine hut . . . or even while crossing a lonely frozen moor at home.

* * * * *

On the far side of Lake Baikal the longest part of the train-journey began, and during the whole of it the soldiers never ceased telling each other stories—most of them founded on folk tales common to all countries. Many could neither read nor write, "and that," says Baring, "is probably how the Iliad was handed down, generation after generation." As usual, he made friends with his fellow-travellers and when one of them remarked that the Japanese were a savage race, another who had been to Nagasaki cut him short by saying: "They are a charming, clever people, much more cultivated than you and me." Arrived in China proper, he found that hotel-keepers never set about making a room habitable till they know someone is going to inhabit it; whereupon an architect, a builder, and an upholsterer are sent for, and in a few hours any old den is converted into a comfortable and elegant bedroom. Rather the principle of our county urban authorities, who won't stir a finger till all the semi-detached

villas on either side of a road that consists of mud, ruts, and holes are not only inhabited, but the windows behung with impenetrable lace curtains and garnished with aspidistras.

The account of the Manchurian war in *The Puppet Show* has for me great fascination. There are many things one would like to know respecting its aftermath; for instance, if the recent inroads of Japan have at all modified Chinese contempt for soldiers and soldiering. Twenty-five years ago the word "ping," which apparently is Chinese for "soldier man," was used to express the acme of contempt, and Baring tells an amusing story of a tiny child dressed with extreme elegance, who, gravely and unsmilingly, with the dignity of an Emperor and the serenity of a pontiff, watched the Cossacks unharnessing their horses in the courtyard, and finally walked up to the huge hirsute sentry who was guarding the Cossack treasure chest and said "Ping" with an accent of indescribable contempt.

Altogether Baring's admiration for the Chinese threatens at times to make him faithless to his beloved Russians. "People say," he remarks, "'The Chinese are so backward, poor things.' My advice to such people is to go and see. They will find that the Chinese arrived at a certain level of civilisation centuries ago, and remained there because they saw nothing in the progress of other countries which tempted them to imitate it. They anticipated our so-called civilisation and deliberately discarded it, not considering that it would tend to greater happiness in the long run."

In another place he writes: "They are not ambitious and they are satisfied with little. To them the important thing is not the quantity of things achieved in Life, but the quality of the life lived. They are not in a hurry; for that reason they fail to see why a motor-car is a better vehicle than a rickshaw, because if no one is in a hurry there is no disadvantage in proceeding in a leisurely fashion.

"They see us spending our whole lives in hurrying after something, in aiming at being somebody, in kicking others aside in order to get somewhere. They continue the game for the sake

of the game and not for the sake of winning any concrete prize. They are honest and hard-working, cultivated, intelligent, good-mannered and good-tempered. They hate fighting, brawling, noise of all kinds, drunkenness, and bad manners. Are they so very backward?"

One might suspect the writer of exaggeration, were it not that his view coincides with the views of many whom no one can accuse of going off at tangents of poetical enthusiasm. Also, though allowing for possible deterioration due to increased contact with Western ethics, I cling to an impression stamped indelibly on my own brain only two years before the Manchurian war.

In 1902 I happened to be in Berlin when a certain Royal Chinese Prince, who had been despatched by the old Empress to apologise for the murder of the German Minister in Peking during the Boxer rising, arrived with his suite. I first saw the Chinese party on a Gala Night at the Opera, the idea of which was to impress the weak minds of these barbarians with the artistic achievements of the murdered man's country. In one proscenium box sat the Kaiser; behind him stood his staff, silent and stiff as the well-nourished ramrods they resembled, yet turning into servile worms when addressed by the All-Highest. In the opposite box sat the Chinese. The Prince, a magnificently dressed *grand seigneur*, was generally in conversation with one or other of his suite, and oh! what dignity, what easy courtesy, what breeding pervaded that box! Next day you read in the newspapers very offensive accounts of how the Chinese, overwhelmed by the might and majesty of Germany, had tremblingly entered the Throne Room, how as soon as they caught sight of the Kaiser they fell flat on their faces and wriggled along the slippery parquet on their stomachs till they reached and kissed his Hessian boots. I forget what formality is prescribed by Chinese ritual for these occasions, but whatever their customs obliged them to do, it will have been done without loss of dignity.

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Until *The Puppet Show* appeared I only knew of two books in which battle-fields are described in a manner convincing to the layman: the early Waterloo chapters of *La Chartreuse de Parme*, and Napoleon's Russian campaign in *La Guerre et la Paix*; but not even these pages bring war home to you more vividly than Baring, whether here, in Manchuria, or in the Great War. It is the sense of humour, the personal intensely human element that differentiates his war pictures from others. For instance, when he complains of the constant stumbling of his pony, the reply of his attendant, a black-bearded Caucasian, all revolvers and silver trimmings, is quoted: "It's not the pony; the truth is, little father, that just a little you don't know how to ride." There is an almost unbearably harrowing account of Colonel Philemonev, Commander of the battery to which Baring was attached; always in pain owing to the terrible internal disease of which he was dying, sometimes lying on the ground half-unconscious with agony, yet refusing to be taken to the rear because he knew he was the best artillery officer in the Siberian army.

The heroism and resignation of the wounded is a theme touched on again and again, and nowhere more heart-rendingly than in the following scene:

"I was holding up a man who had been terribly mangled in the legs by a bayonet. The doctor was bandaging him. He screamed with pain. The doctor said the screaming upset him. I asked the man to try not to scream and lit a cigarette and put it in his mouth. He stopped immediately and smoked and remained quite still until his socks were taken off. The men scarcely ever had socks; their feet were swathed in a kind of linen puttee. This man had socks, and when they were taken off he cried, saying he would never see them again. I promised to keep them for him and he said, 'Thank you, my protector.' A little later he died."

He tells us that when the soldiers were given tea or cigarettes, they made the sign of the Cross and thanked Heaven before thanking their human benefactor. "One seems to be plunged in the lowest inferno of human pain, to have before one the symbol

of the whole suffering of the human race; men like bewildered children, stricken by some unknown force for some unexplained reason—crying out and sobbing in their anguish, yet accepting and not railing against their destiny, and grateful for the slightest alleviation and help in their distress.”

One day, riding home after a terrible battle in which time after time the Japanese came smiling up to the trenches, and were mown down till the trenches were chock-a-block with dead and dying—and on came more and more men over their bodies—riding home that evening, when the noise was still too deafening to attempt speech, these were his reflections:

“I thought of all the heroes of the past, from the Trojan wars onward, and of the words which those who have not fought their country’s battles but made their country’s songs have said about these men and their deeds; and I asked myself, ‘Is that all true? Is it true that these things become like the shining pattern on a glorious banner, the captain jewels of a great crown which is the richest heirloom of nations? Or is all this an illusion? Is war an abominable return to barbarism, the emancipation of the beast in man, the riot of all that is bad, brutal and hideous; the suspension and destruction of civilisation by its very means and engines; and are those songs and those words which stir our blood merely the dreams of those who have been resolutely excluded from the horrible reality?’ And then I thought of the sublime courage of Colonel Philemonev, and of the thousands of unknown men who had fought that day without the remotest notion of the why and wherefore; and I thought that war is to man what motherhood is to woman—a burden, a source of untold suffering, and yet a glory.”

I am afraid I cannot share this view, though glad it comforted him in a dark hour; or at least I should be glad if words like these did not give people a handle for glorifying war. As well, so it seems to me, gloss over the bad shipbuilding and poor seamanship that sometimes send ships to the bottom, because, as they sink, human courage has risen to sublime heights again and again!

VII

HOME AGAIN—RUSSIA—BAUMANN'S FUNERAL—MOWING—BELL- CASTING—IN SOUTH RUSSIA

At the end of 1904 the *Morning Post* no longer wanted a correspondent in Manchuria. So Baring went home, did a certain amount of dramatic criticism for that journal, and saw Duse, who came to London in the summer of 1905, at the full range of her powers. The result is an admirable parallel between her and Sarah Bernhardt in *The Puppet Show*.

At the end of that summer (1905) back he went to Manchuria, but on September 1st peace was declared, and if the return journey was slow and difficult it was because what they delicately referred to as "the unpleasantness," that is, the prelude to the Russian tragedy, had already begun. In one of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* bewitchment is abroad, and everything and everybody cease to function. So it was here. Arrived at the junction, engine-drivers quietly stepped off their engines and declined to go any farther; telegraph clerks refused to put through messages, and when, by hook or by crook, Baring contrived to reach Moscow, a terrific strike was just over and the aspect of the town was that of a besieged city. In November he witnessed the quiet march of 100,000 people behind Baumann's coffin, which one has always been told was the real beginning of the revolution; yet the theatres were doing business as usual. Soon afterwards a second strike occurred. Baring was living at his former landlady's pension, some way out of Moscow, but on Christmas Eve he drove into the town to see a friend. Distant, and sometimes quite near sounds of firing were heard, and nobody seemed to care a scrap. If there was a barricade they drove round it, but curiosity led many to go and look where things were happening.

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and several were killed in that way. Some were indignant with the strikers, others on their side, but the attitude of the average man in the street seemed to be sceptical indifference; whether to the Constitution which had just been promised them, or to disorders which had now become such an everyday occurrence that they ceased to make any impression. A cabman said to him: "There is an illness abroad, we are sick; it will pass, but God remains." Little did anyone dream then that Lenin would be the doctor.

He spent all the critical winter of 1905-6 at Moscow and describes the glories of the Easter celebrations; also a few other Easter customs. "I was writing in my sitting-room and I heard a faint mutter of 'Gospodi, Gospodil' ('Lord, Lord!') in the next room. It was the policeman sighing for his tip; not wishing to disturb but anxious to indicate his presence. He brought me a crimson egg, and must, I think, have been pleased with his tip, because policemen kept on coming all the morning, and there were not more than two who belonged to my street."

In October 1906 Baring took up his duties as correspondent to the *Morning Post* at St. Petersburg, and stayed in Russia, with short interludes spent in France and England, right up to the end of 1907, tossing about on the waves of these seething years, analysing this Duma and that Duma (there were three of them in all). His account of this epoch must be deeply interesting to students of Russian history, but what chiefly arrests the attention of readers like myself are the pictures of peasant life with which his Memoirs swarm.

There is a wonderful one, for instance, of a sort of mowing bout he witnessed about ten miles from Moscow. On a certain day groups of peasants assemble with their carts, the river is crossed on a floating-bridge, and towards sunset, when the destination is reached, vodka is produced and drunk in cups, followed by much abuse and quarrelling. But the guest is assured it doesn't really mean anything, only he mustn't come too near, for "men who have drink taken are careless with scythes."

Presently the particular strip of meadow each is to mow is settled by the casting of lots and work begins. "It was a beautiful sight," writes Baring, "to see the mowing in the sunset by the river. The meadows were of an intense soft green, the sky fleecy and golden towards the west, and to the east black with a great thundercloud lit up with intermittent lightning." The mowers, dressed in all the colours of the rainbow, mowed till twilight; then carts were turned into tents by setting them up on end, stretching matting across the shafts, and making up hay beds underneath. After the regulation amount of drinking, praying, squabbling, and singing had been worked off (the singing lasted four hours on end) everyone went to sleep.

As soon as it was light they started work again, and Baring says it was hard to decide whether the evening or the morning setting were the more lovely. The dawn was grey with pearly clouds, and suffused with the faintest pink tinge, and in the east the sun rose like a red ball with no clouds near it. At ten o'clock they drove to an inn and had tea; then drove back again, carted the hay, and started for Moscow, Baring stretched in sleep on one of the loads. Again they crossed the river, again halted for tea, and once more the guest climbed on to the top of his waggon-load, sank back into a green paradise of dreams, and remembers nothing more till Moscow was reached at five o'clock in the evening. "I had always envied," he says, "the drivers of carts whom one meets lying fast asleep on a load of hay, and now I know from experience that there is no such delicious slumber, with the kind sun warming one through and through after a cold night, and the slow jolting of the waggon rocking one, and the smell of the hay acting like a soporific. Every now and then I awoke to see the world through a golden haze, and then fell back and drowsed in a deep slumber of an inexpressibly delicious quality."

Another picture vividly recalls, to such of us as learned German in our youth, hours when we endeavoured with difficulty and slight aversion to learn Schiller's *Song of the Bell* by

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heart. At the age of twelve I for one had no appreciation whatever of this poem, and being a small English prig thought it rather coarse of the poet to begin by insisting on the necessity of sweating profusely if the "blessing from above" was to be earned. True, one knew about the "honest sweat" of the Village Blacksmith, but I suppose considered "sweat" a rather nicer word than "Schweiss"—(but not very!)

In Russia the casting of a big bell is a religious ceremony, particularly if it is a church bell, as on the occasion Baring describes. The furnace, a brick erection open to east and west, was presided over by two huge men who ceaselessly stirred with enormous poles the molten metal it contained. An endless *Te Deum* went on the whole time, sung by women with red-and-white Eastern head-dresses and men who looked like figures in a sacred picture. Characters from the *Nibelungen* were also present; *Siegfried* in sheepskin and high leather boots, wielding a huge hammer; *Mime*, "whining and disagreeable as usual, having his head smacked"; big bearded men listening spell-bound as if expecting a miracle. And the *Te Deum* went on and on, and barefooted children with straw-coloured hair and blue eyes dashed madly about under everybody's feet.

Watching the scene, noticing how oddly the crowd resembled a huge tough sponge; how if pushed in one direction by those whose duty it was to preserve it from being scalded alive, it bulged out in another—indissoluble, passive, and obstinate—it occurred to Baring that the Russian character is made up on similar lines; so much apparent weakness and softness, so much obvious elasticity and malleability, blent with hidden, passive resistance.

Suddenly the head man called out: "Now let us pray to God," regardless of the fact that praying had been going on for two hours without a break and that many things and persons had been prayed for beside the bell. But the ensuing moment of silent prayer was supposed to be dedicated exclusively to the bell. Baring threw a rouble into the furnace, the molten metal, released, poured down a narrow channel into the mould, and

the bell was born.* One could multiply these pictures indefinitely, and that is one of the chief charms of *The Puppet Show*.

* * * * *

In the autumn of 1907 he went for the first time to South Russia and found himself in a landscape unlike anything he had seen in that part of the world; it reminded him of South Devonshire. "Here," he says, "instead of being conquered by the sharp wounds of the invading cold, the summer was dying like a decadent Roman Emperor of excess of splendour, softness, and opulence."

Among his adventures was a visit to a certain Count André Bobrinsky, one of a huge colony of Bobrinskys whose various dwellings were dotted about the countryside, and who, on the principle of Highland clans in days gone by, were dominated and governed by the head of the family, Count Lev Bobrinsky—an old man of astounding vigour and activity, both of mind and body. He was afraid of nothing, and so strong that once, when attacked by a huge hound he fought the infuriated animal with his bare hands and broke its jaw like a twig.

One day they all went out to shoot roebuck. Count Lev no longer shot himself but he organised every detail of the day's sport, and Baring was given a rifle and warned not to shoot a doe. Presently he heard a rustling in the undergrowth and when someone shouted "*Don't shoot!*", he understood "*Shoot!*" and shot—with what effect is not stated. But such was the awe inspired by Count Lev that it was decided by the whole party not to say anything about it.

In the evening a neighbour, Count Yashville, who had been of the party, took Baring to see the old chief, found him as usual going through the bag and the number of shots fired, and in order to forestall awkward questions volunteered that Baring had not had a shot—a statement which the other's silence seemed to confirm.

* There is another and perhaps even better account of this ceremony in *What I Saw in Russia, 1907-14* (Part III).

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IN SOUTH RUSSIA

The following day Baring departed, and subsequently learned that Count Lev, whom nothing could escape, had discovered that one of his barrels was foul, and the whole thing came out! Telling which tale Baring remarks: "I felt I could never go there again."

VIII

6, NORTH STREET—"THE GREY STOCKING" PLAYED—JOURNALISM
—CONVERSION — FINANCE LORD — CONSTANTINOPLE — LONDON:
"NORTH STREET GAZETTE" AND FURTHER OUTPUT—"THE GREEN
ELEPHANT" PRODUCED—RETURN VISIT TO THE MEMBERS OF THE
DUMA—"THE DOUBLE GAME" PRODUCED—VOYAGE ROUND THE
WORLD—THE TURCO-BULGARIAN WAR—CHOLERA VISITATION

IN the middle of December, 1907, he returned to London and worked away at journalism, writing weekly articles for the *Morning Post*. It was probably in the spring of 1908 that he took possession of a new domicile, 6 North Street, Westminster, for the house-warming party given to sixty guests and described in Chesterton's autobiography, took place in June, and shortly before this his first modern play, *The Grey Stocking*, had been produced in London.

The address was misleading, for 6 North Street was an old cottage, far more countrified than anything you could find to-day within ten miles of Hyde Park Corner, yet huddled comfortably under the wing of the Houses of Parliament. For some unknown reason left in the lurch by modern progress, it stood on a rough plot of ground; there were grassy growths and a few unhappy-looking fruit-trees. One staircase ran up the outside wall and led, I think, to rooms sometimes occupied by Mr. Belloc. One morning I was conducted up there about ten o'clock by Baring. On the table were two coffee-cups, the remains of two breakfasts, and one huge unblackened boot, evidently unacquainted with boot trees, which I judged to be the property of Belloc.

The articles Baring wrote in this and succeeding years re-appeared eventually in the form of three books, *Orpheus in Mayfair*, *Dead Letters*, and *Diminutive Dramas*; and there was yet

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another book of Fairy-tales, containing wholly of stories published in the *Morning Post*, entitled *The Glass Mender*. These articles rained in from this, that and the other quarter; from country houses he was staying in, and sometimes from the high seas, for from 1908 to the present day he has done about sixteen cruises on men-of-war.

In the early summer of 1908, with the death of Henry Brewster Baring lost not only one of his warmest admirers but a powerful stimulus, convinced as Brewster was that he (or any artist) should follow the bent of his genius regardless of the applause of the world. In Letter Section I will be found a particularly fine letter from this prince of letter-writers to Baring on that theme, dated Rome, Christmas '03, and as long as Baring was "en poste" there, H.B.'s letters to me were full of allusions to him.

There is a charming passage in one of them about his favourite of the poetic dramas, *Tristram and Iseult*: "Attention is riveted at once; you can neither say when nor how this or that happened, but you are floating quietly in blue space, and you cannot even hear the flapping of the wings. Nor does it seem to matter much what happens; you are as willing to go to the right as to the left when you glide through the air with such exquisite ease and the sky is a haze of gold. . . ."

For Baring's fertility he had great respect, and remarked that in bygone days people like "Lope di Vega et Compagnie" wrote like that. In one of his letters there is an admiring picture of Baring's manner of life in Rome: "He has got another subject now*—is preparing another litter of rabbits to scamper on the Elysian fields. Well, praise the Lord and Selah! All this doesn't prevent his taking daily a three hours' lesson of Russian, and devoting two hours and a half to visits, besides his professional duties. . . ."

The Puppet Show gives but a brief account of the crucial action of his life, his joining the Church of Rome in February 1909. And perhaps it is permissible to add, without further comment,

* Mahasena.

that, informed of the event many months after it had happened, one had the feeling that the missing piece of a complicated puzzle, or rather the only key wherewith a given iron safe could be unlocked, had at last been found. He remarks that this is the only action of his life which he is quite sure he never regretted, and I fancy that most people who knew him—of whatever persuasion, or even of no persuasion at all—will have seen, or anyhow have come to see in it eventually, a matter for nothing but rejoicing.

But in his *Memoirs* there is no mention, brief or otherwise, of something that happened either in the same or the next year, which, if you know the man, is extremely funny. Having been sent by Baring Brothers to Moscow to negotiate a loan for tramways, or at least to watch the proceedings (for one cannot believe he was made responsible for business details), he sat like the Mikado in the hotel and refused to see a soul, whereby he got the reputation of being an inflexible Lord of Finance. After two days someone informed him that the other side had at last consented to the terms insisted on by Baring Brothers, and Baring presided at the ensuing banquet.

When, only the other day, I was told this story, I could not think what it reminded me of; then I recollected the Indian undergraduate at Cambridge and Baring's claim to be Mr. Godavery. In Moscow everyone believed he was Mr. Godavery, and very likely there are Russian greybeards to this day who, when they come across his books, many of which have been translated into Russian, may be heard murmuring: "Odd that a man who might have dominated international finance should have gone for literature in this bald-headed fashion!"

In April 1909 he was sent to Constantinople and arrived there on the day that Abdul Hamid, whom the Young Turks had dethroned, left the city. The revolution was a military one, and but for occasionally coming across groups of Danny Deever's being hung on bridges, the surface life of Constantinople was unchanged. There is a delightful account of his sallying forth with Mr. Aubrey Herbert, of the Embassy, to see the installation

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of the new Sultan, and he tells how, during an interminable wait, whatever question they addressed to bystanders of this kind and courteous race, the reply was: "Have patience, my lamb; the Sultan will soon be here!" It is quite a relief to gather from this anecdote that there was one language of which Baring was not master.

He had gone to Turkey expecting great things of the Young Turks, as we all did, but, speedily disillusioned, he was soon echoing the words of one who had lived many years in Constantinople: "*Qui sont les jeunes Turcs? Il n'y a que les Turcs!*" I seem to remember that this revised view did not square with the policy of the newspaper which had sent him out. Anyhow, by the end of June he was back in London, having contrived to cram masses of pregnant experiences into very few weeks; and the autumn found him, as usual, in Russia.

In the spring of 1910 he and Belloc embarked on a newspaper called *The North Street Gazette*, the correspondence column of which was undertaken by Mr. Raymond Asquith. It was liberally subscribed for, and judging by the brilliant extracts from the first number given in *The Puppet Show* should have been a great success. But alas! there was no second number; subscriptions were returned, and the epigraph of this gay but rather wild enterprise was, "Out, out, brief Scandal." Its mantle descended on a weekly called *The Eye Witness*, edited by Belloc, and in this journal appeared Baring's *Lost Diaries*, which, properly speaking, belongs to the other two books of pseudo-ancient history, *Dead Letters* and *Diminutive Dramas*. Now all three have been issued in one volume entitled *Unreliable History*.

There is a certain sameness in the log of these years: "Summer in England, autumn in Russia," interspersed with fish-like dartings hither and thither between these two fixed points. And all this time he was writing various books about Russia which will be discussed later.

But there were plenty of other literary enterprises on hand and in the summer of 1911 his play, *The Green Elephant*, was produced at the Comedy Theatre, but without success.

After the usual autumn at Sosnofka he went back to England for Christmas, and in January 1912 was sent officially to Russia in order to assist in a return visit of Members of Parliament, the Army, the Navy, and the Church to the Russian Duma. (If I did not say that in 1909 members of the Duma had visited England, I say it now.) This return visit lasted a fortnight and consisted of a series of banquets, gala performances, trotting races and what not in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Outsiders always ask themselves who, exactly, is entertained by these terrible functions; but as people generally enjoy—at least afterwards—a triumph, I think Baring must have enjoyed delivering what Sir Bernard Pares calls “the speech of his life”—an amazing platform effort, in Russian of course, that was ever after referred to among his colleagues as “Mr. Baring’s platform speech.”

In the summer of that same year his third play, *The Double Game*, was given for a series of matinées twice a week. It was extremely well received at the first performance and success seemed assured, but once more the attendance was disappointing.

Shortly afterwards he started on a tour round the world, the result of which was what seems to me one of the most enchanting, also one of the most unusual travel-books ever written: *Round the World in any Number of Days*.

In October of the same year (1912) *The Times* sent him to the Balkans, where war had broken out. I think this persistence of newspaper editors in using Baring as War Correspondent is impressive and creditable to both parties. Evelyn Waugh says that during the Italo-Abyssinian conflict our correspondents were only slightly more virtuous than the Americans, in that when short of copy the latter calmly romanced, whereas our people confined themselves to making newspaper mountains out of molehills. Baring’s methods were different. When he had no battles to report he summoned some other goddess than Bellona to his aid; on one occasion, as we have seen, it was Melpomene, and instead of a battle picture his editor received a review of a striking play. But if authentic information was to be had, he spared himself no trouble to get it, and Sir Bernard

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Pares relates that, when other correspondents were vainly pumping this person and that as to the probable reaction of the people to the dissolution of the first Duma, Baring travelled on three successive days to and fro between Moscow and St. Petersburg, third class, discussing the event with fellow-passengers. One may conclude it was not only on account of his vivid narrative style, but also because of his enterprise and reliability, that he was once more sent to the seat of war by the foremost English Journal.

There was already one *Times* correspondent at Bulgarian Headquarters, and when Baring reached Uskub, finding there was no chance of getting within range of any fighting, he returned to Sofia, stopping on his way at Nish, where just outside the Serbian hospital stood a small church. Originally it was a monument built by the Turks to celebrate the taking of Nish, and its architecture was designed as a deterrent to future risings, the walls being almost entirely constructed of the skulls of massacred Serbians. The turning of it into a church was a happy thought, and one cannot help hoping it irritated the Mohammedans. Meanwhile as Sofia provided nothing interesting to be done or seen, and as there appeared to be less chance than ever of getting to the front, Baring made his way to Constantinople.

As a rule I only draw on the *Memoirs* for matters not treated in his books, but in *Letters from the Near East*, published in the following year, there is much the same terrible account of the cholera at San Stefano in 1912 as in *The Puppet Show*. Until about a fortnight before his arrival, the dead and dying had been lying "like crushed insects" under the outside wall of the town, without shelter, food, or water. At last, finding that nothing was being done for these people, many of whom were wounded or broken soldiers sent back from the front, two heroic women—Miss Alt, a Swiss lady over seventy, and her friend, Madame Schneider, an Austrian—took the matter in hand. They started with a fund of four pounds, and were joined presently by two or three equally fearless men; helped financially by the American and English Embassies, these ladies performed miracles that vie

with anything done by Florence Nightingale and her devoted band in the Crimean War.

The pages dealing with this terrible visitation are among the most moving Baring has written. He thinks that, once they started work, the Turkish medical authorities did their best, but they made no attempt to cope with the situation till stimulated by the heroic example of Miss Alt and Madame Schneider. Eventually both ladies succumbed to the disease, and though they recovered, it was in a broken and destitute condition. A fund was opened for them by Lady Lowther at the British Embassy, and one hopes, for the sake of English and American honour, that the response was adequate; but on that point I have no information.

IX

LONDON AGAIN — WOMAN SUFFRAGE — OPERATED — SEVILLE —
RUSSIA, SEVILLE AGAIN AND SOSNOFKA—TRIP TO CONSTANTI-
NOPLÉ—HOME AGAIN

IN December of that year Baring went back to London. The annals of his life from January 1913 to the outbreak of the Great War are practically nil, and as I myself was at that time up to the eyes in the struggle for the vote, my recollections about anything else are sparse.

If I mention one episode that connects with that epoch, it is not from egotism but because it marks a certain stage in the story of Baring's inner life.

Nearly all his intimates, Belloc and the two Chestertons for instance, were anti-suffragists, and even though there were exceptions in the Roman Catholic community, its whole trend did not seem to us favourable to what is quite correctly called the Emancipation of Women. Thus a grim conflict arose between Baring and myself. I remember his asking if it were not possible to ascribe his attitude to "invincible ignorance," and no doubt my replies were as unmitigated as they would be to-day. Among other things I said that though you can *to a certain extent* condone cruelty to animals on the score that those who practise it, the Italians for instance, know no better, you cannot tolerate it among your own countrymen; and that the attitude of himself and his friends was that of "congenital bullies." In fact, a friendship I greatly valued, and which otherwise—of that I was certain—would stand firm to the end of my life, was tottering.

But mercifully, as Helen remarked of Menelaus a good many years after the flight to Troy, Baring was "not lacking in intelli-

gence," and he not only came to understand and share my point of view, but took pains to modify that of his friends. To-day I daresay he has forgotten that our friendship was ever in danger. Very few men can be asked to see with a woman's eyes what was then at stake, and indeed in ordinary men one could condone "invincible ignorance" on this point; but Baring was not an ordinary man. On this whole matter I shall print a remarkable letter from him written later.

One day he came to see me at Holloway, and showed signs of agitation when we were sternly requested by the wardress not to converse in any language but English. Still more upset was he when, in a sort of code in English, invented by me on the spot, which of course he instantly jumped to but which terrified him still more, I said that if he would let his overcoat fall on to the floor I would drop on to it a letter which would he please post? As I think the Bobrinsky episode indicates, at certain crises presence of mind was not his strong suit, and never have I seen anyone so rattled as poor Maurice Baring throughout that interview.

Meanwhile the Suffrage vortex whirled faster and faster, and those who were in it lost sight, for the time being, of everything else on earth; but I remember hearing that in January 1913 he had been very ill, had been operated for internal abscess, and had gone to Seville to recoup. He stayed in Seville with his friend M. de Bréal the painter and his wife till the end of April, and long afterwards M. de Bréal told me that they had taken the convalescent out for an airing on a very mild old animal that for years could not be persuaded to go faster than a very slow walk. But no sooner was Baring on its back than it ran away full gallop. One remembers the remark of his Caucasian attendant in Manchuria: "The truth is, little father, that just a little you do not know how to ride," only as a rule, if people who can't ride get on to a nag so aged that it cannot be urged into a trot, not improbably the animal will refuse even to walk —perhaps even lie down. What M. Bréal never expected was to see it turn into a potential Derby winner.

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The other item contributed by M. de Bréal concerned a supper at a restaurant. The weather was very severe, and Baring had such a bad cold that he refused to smoke, in spite of which he was *étincelant d'esprit et de gaieté*.^{*} The party broke up at about eleven p.m. and crossing the "Place" Baring suddenly threw his great-coat into the basin of a fountain, and without removing his shoes crouched down *à la Russe* in about nine inches of water and executed a Cossack dance, accompanied by cries of delight and horror from the Bréals' servant. Next morning the great-coat, dried in the sun and pressed, was restored to him, and his remark was: "What! back again? I did think I had got rid of it at last!"

I relate these incidents because all down his life, whenever the occasion was favourable, they happened; not owing to the juice of the grape but because his nature evidently had need of a safety-valve which was met thus. Though Goethe no doubt would have looked askance at such proceedings, likewise Milton, Wordsworth, or Tennyson, many sorts of people are necessary to making a world; and it is amusing to reflect that this lunatic dancing at midnight in a municipal fountain at Seville is the man who, ten years later, was writing some of the most spiritual novels in English literature!

He stayed in Seville till the end of April, and then came back to London. It must have been about that time that he went twice to Russia and back in one week in order to convey messages between the Benckendorffs and their son Constantine, who lived at St. Petersburg. Where friendship was concerned the "Flying Dutchman" was a lethargic stay-at-home compared with Baring; once in 1906 he came from St. Petersburg to Prague for one night, solely to hear my opera, *The Wreckers*!

In the autumn he went as usual to Russia, stayed there all winter, spent the Easter of 1914 at Seville, returned to England by sea, and again went to Russia. When the reader sees in Part II the list of books he has put forth about that country, the marvel is that he ever contrived to be anywhere else!

^{*} Brilliantly witty and gay.

Yet that spring he executed one of his fish-like dartings, this time to Constantinople; and by way of showing that, hard as he worked, he always contrived to get in any amount of fun, here is a brief account of that little holiday.

He stayed at the Embassy, Sir Louis Mallet being then Ambassador, and there met a joyous company of some of his best friends of both sexes; and one of them tells me it was "an entrancing fortnight."

Among them was Lady D., who was due back in England to take up, on a fixed date, High Duties that could not be postponed, and as Baring had business in Paris they left Constantinople together. But, arrived at Sofia they learned that great floods had occurred in the Balkans, and that in Serbia part of the railway had been washed away. So there was nothing for it but to go round by Rumelia and Bulgaria to Rumania.

There were various incidents: a perilous crossing of the Danube, just then a roaring torrent, in an overladen cockleshell of a steamer; perpetual foraging for non-existent food; such trains as were running, or rather crawling, were crammed; in fact, Lady D. declared afterwards that only a man of polyglot brain, infinite resource, and indomitable character could have coped with the situation. At one moment they found themselves on some obscure single-track line, and when the train, for which they had waited hours and hours, arrived, it was full to bursting. Finally they succeeded in scrambling into a compartment every square inch of which was occupied by a huge family of middle-class Germans, who were more than friendly about making room for them.

Now, Lady D. was (and is) an exceedingly striking-looking woman, the very last word of elegance, and bewitching of address. On this occasion she laid herself out to please with such success that the gallant old head of the family, regardless of the scarcity of provisions, pressed a splendid orange into Baring's hand with the words: "Das, bitte, ist für Ihre Frau Gemahlin." (This, if you please is for your lady-wife). Losing his head, Baring replied with haste and embarrassment: "Sie ist *nicht* meine Frau

Gemahlin" (She is *not* my lady-wife). Whereupon, so Lady D. tells me, the party, being of a class that in 1914 was still inclined to confuse elegance with light morals, fell silent, and the ladies drew their skirts away from her; in fact, the situation of *Boule de Suif* was repeated on that godforsaken little side-line in the middle of the Near East.

Somewhat shattered (I expect) by this misadventure, Baring returned from Paris to Russia and spent that summer alone at Sosnofka, writing his *Outlines of Russian Literature*, little dreaming that he would never again see the Benckendorffs' home. The nightingales sang all day long in the garden and all night long people were doing the same thing in the village—a month of trancelike calm preceding an upheaval that was to convulse the whole world. He knew nothing about public events, but was suddenly seized with a desire to go home. It seemed a foolish idea; he had finished his book, and as he meant to return to Russia in August why go now? He took the *Sortes Shakespearianae*, opened a volume at random and his pencil fell on the phrase "Pack and be gone." (*Comedy of Errors*, iii, 2, 158.) He waited one day more and repeated the experiment, and again his pencil fell on the same line (I am quoting verbatim from *The Puppet Show*, but confess I do not quite visualise the behaviour of the pencil). Then he settled to go, and when he arrived at the Friedrichstrasse station in Berlin he read in the newspapers that the Austrian Archduke had been assassinated, and hurried on to London to begin the *Vita Nuova*.

PART II

HIS WORK

X

"COLLECTED POEMS" AND "SELECTED POEMS"—OMISSIONS—
BARING'S COMIC VEIN—CHAUNDY'S BIBLIOGRAPHY—TRIOLETS,
ETC.

I HAVE often wished there were a word in English corresponding to "*œuvre*" in French. "Work" is unsatisfactory, "works" still more so. Indeed, having a fondness inherited from the nineteenth century for what was once called "plain Anglo-Saxon," I had almost used the word "*output*." But better accept the limitations of one's mother-tongue and stick to the conventional term "work."

So prolific is this author, with such royal ease, such indifference to the springs of the Muses' chariot does he forsake any rut its wheels happen to be in at the moment and travel on in another; so gaily has he rung the changes, now on this, now on that form of art, that perhaps the best plan is to sort his work into categories and deal with them methodically, indicating dates as you go along. And I think pride of place should be given to Baring the poet, because his earliest steps along the road to Parnassus were taken to the beat of rhythm.

COLLECTED POEMS (1925), SELECTED POEMS (1930)

THE first of these volumes opens with one of the most beautiful, direct, and human elegies in the English language, and one envies Baring to whom it was given thus to commemorate one of the best loved, the most intensely admired of his friends. I think all who knew Auberon Herbert, Lord Lucas ("Bron," as his friends called him), and perhaps many who had not this great

POEMS: "COLLECTED" & "SELECTED"

privilege, if for a while they have laid this poem aside and then taken it up again and read it, will not be able to hold back tears. So at least it has gone with the writer of these lines.

Of this man, who had lost a leg in the Boer War, who learned to fly at thirty-nine and was shot down in battle, one stanza in Baring's poem says—not in poetic hyperbole, but in sober truth:—

God, who had made you valiant, strong, and swift,
And maimed you with a bullet long ago,
And cleft your riotous ardour with a rift,
And checked your youth's tumultuous overflow,
Gave back your youth to you
And packed in moments rare and few
Achievements manifold
And happiness untold
And bade you spring to Death as to a bride
In manhood ripeness, power, and pride,
And on your sandals the strong wings of youth.
He let you leave a name
To shine on the entablatures of truth
For ever:
To sound for ever in answering halls of fame.

I think even a non-musician must be struck by the easy, the extraordinarily effective changes of rhythm in this poem.

There is a sketch of Lord Lucas's short and astonishing career in Baring's *War Diary*; and so fitting to such a story was his end, that the exquisite last ten lines of the Elegy express what all his friends will have felt when they learned how Death had come to him.

* * * * *

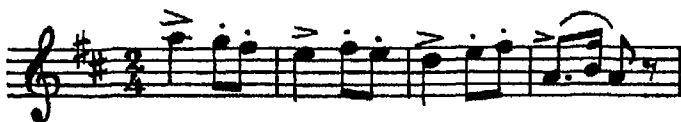
The second great Elegy Baring has written is to his sailor nephew Cecil Spencer, who had served with great distinction at Zeebrugge, and died at Malta in consequence of a riding accident. Printed in the *Selected Poems*, I had lost the book for a few years, and re-reading that poem now, I find it even more moving and

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perfect than I had remembered . . . the heroic young life ebbing away in the hospital, the Fleet anchored in the bay; the whole island ringing with a noise of Carnival. And then the burial at sea, which, as told in the last stanza, catches strangely at the heart, because in it lives the whole Navy which Baring knows and loves so well.

The firing party fired its rounds of blank,
The last note of the Last Post sounded and died;
The wreaths thrown over the side
Drifted upon the tide
And sank.
And now the band
With pipe and clarion
And the quick step summoned every hand
To carry on.

The Quick Step referred to is Schubert's *Marche Militaire* in D (Opus 51), which was the special march of the flag-ship (the *Queen Elizabeth*) during that commission.



In this volume is a poem called *Per Ardua* which must be of great interest to fliers. It is a sort of Hymn to the Flying Corps, or perhaps one should say a piece of history in verse, for in those terrible years, 1914-18, the arm to which Baring was attached practically came into existence. But to the ordinary layman it cannot appeal as I am told it does to those who served with the poet.

* * * * *

As to the *Sonnets*, one is puzzled to choose, among two or three favourites, a specimen for quotation. They are very varied in



Lieut.-Commander the Hon. Cecil Spencer.

POEMS: "COLLECTED" & "SELECTED"

character; one, "Shall I pretend that I no more perceive," is a frank and lovely imitation of Shakespeare; another is a vision of Paolo and Francesca travelling for ever in anguish through Eternity, for ever together "on the never-resting air" and unwilling to exchange their Hell for all Heaven. There is a group entitled *Vita Nuova* in which for one moment the veil of a sanctuary is drawn aside—where we read of the tear "that stretched and became a shining bridge to bliss,"—of the treasure and resting place, the motherland and immemorial home found at last. Thus reading, we thank the poet, for whose well-being we have by this time come to care, for showing us the innermost fold of his heart, remain silent, and turn back the pages to select for quotation the Sonnet on page 34.

I dare not pray to thee, for thou art won
Rarely by those by whom thou hast been wooed;
Thou comest unsolicited, unsued,
Like sudden splendours of the midnight sun.

Yet in my heart the hope shall still abide
That thou hast haply heard my unbreathed prayer;
That in the stifling moment of despair
I shall turn round and find thee by my side.

Like a sad pilgrim who has wandered far,
And hopes not any longer for the day,
But blinded by black thickets finds no way,

Comes to a rift of trees in that sad plight,
And suddenly sees the unending aisles of night
And in the emerald gloom the morning star.

And being unable to leave it out, I must yet quote:

Vale

I am for ever haunted by one dread
That I may suddenly be swept away,
Nor have the leave to see you and to say
Goodbye; then this is what I would have said:

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I have loved summer and the longest day;
The leaves of June, the slumbrous film of heat,
The bees, the swallow, and the waving wheat,
The whistling of the mowers in the hay.

I have loved words which lift the soul with wings,
Words that are windows to eternal things.
I have loved souls that to themselves are true,

Who cannot stoop and know not how to fear,
Yet hold the talisman of pity's tear:
I have loved these because I have loved you.

* * * * *

As I have hinted, from time to time Baring has published various booklets of verse, most of the contents of which have been absorbed into these two volumes. But there are omissions; for instance, the following poem—properly speaking an Elegy on a Battleship. It appeared in *The Times*, by whose courtesy it is reproduced here, in 1931, but except for a few copies privately printed, it has never been republished.

It appears that twelve of His Majesty's ships had borne the name *Tiger*, and on March 26th, 1931, the thirteenth was conveyed home to be broken up and join her predecessors in the Navy's Limbo, wherever that may be. Reading this poem, one struggles with an emotion that is half-pride, half-pain—and, were there such a thing in arithmetic as dividing into three halves, one would add: "half-exultation," though the last stanza is almost too heart-rending to be borne.

The Last Cruise of H.M.S. "Tiger," March 26, 1931

Make: "When does Tiger weigh?"
Said the V.A.
And nevermore
By flag or semaphore
That signal can be made, by flag or flame:
For Battle Cruiser Tiger, thirteenth warship of that name,

POEMS: "COLLECTED" & "SELECTED"

For Battle Cruiser Tiger is sailing home to-day
To be scrapped and thrown away.

Good-bye, Gibraltar. 'There's the usual swell,
And in the air that spicy Spanish smell.
Gibraltar knows the name of Tiger well,
For Tiger helped to take and to defend
The Rock against the changing foe,
Before she went to her long 'make and mend'*
Somewhere beneath the Gulf of Mexico.

Sunrise on the Atlantic: all is peace:
And through soft shreds of ravelled fleece
The rosy sun like some exotic flower
Unfolds its glory to the breathless hour.
Later the sea has a smile as smooth as glass;
But sailors know that silken smile too well—
The passing favour of a fickle lass,
The harbinger of fog and moaning bell.
But now the breeze has blown the mist away
Across the Bay.

Attack by Aircraft is the Exercise.
As from above the skies
Comes a faint ping,
Slight as the whirring of a beetle's wing:
Now come the little specks upon the blue;
Now larger spots: now seaplanes not a few:
And now a deafening roar,
And down upon the ships they swoop and soar.

It's Saturday night at sea, and so to-night,
Although they've darkened ship there will be light
("Tiger, Tiger, burning bright,"
When they darken ship at night)
Within the Wardroom Mess
(It's "Mess Undress")
On silver trophies and on rattling knives,
The while they drink to Sweethearts and to Wives.

* A naval term equivalent to a holiday.

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As bright as a new pin or silver pound
Tiger is cheering ship in Plymouth Sound.
Exultant in her finery,
Like a young Spartan going out to die.
"For scrap-heap or no scrap-heap, as long as she's afloat,"
The Captain said, "upon my ship they shan't detect a mote."
To which the ship made suitable reply:
"We don't think," or in other words, "Aye, Aye."

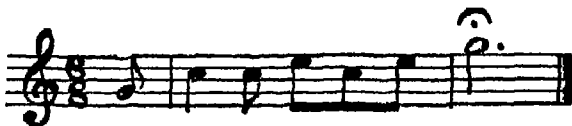
Tiger, to greet you there were mighty ghosts,
And silent signals from immortal hosts;
Tiger who sailed with Drake to tropic seas,
And chased the Spaniard to the Hebrides.
Tiger who bade the Spanish "Tigre" surrender:
Tiger who saw no service was a Tender.
Tiger the sloop, the first to steam (God bless her!)
Sunk by the Russian forts outside Odessa.
Tiger who in an Exercise at night
Sank in collision off the Isle of Wight.
And those who in this Tiger fought and died
At Jutland, came to see you over the side.

Now Tiger has crept back into her lair;
She will not go a-fighting any more;
And there are few who know and less that care.
But there are some whose hearts are very sore.

They'll skin her of her coat and break her neck,
And spoil her brasswork and her spotless deck,
Her purring padding engines (Tigers proper!)
And every shining piece of steel and copper.
For all that pomp and power of black and gold,
Drenched in story,
Scarred with glory,
Must now be broken up and sold,
And broken up and sold or thrown away,
And Tiger shall not live to fight another day.
For Tiger, once the Flagship of Lord Beatty,
Must now be scrapped forthwith, so says the Treaty.
And once upon the scrap-heap, not all the king's men
Will ever put Tiger together again:
Not all the king's horses; not all the king's men.

POEMS: "COLLECTED" & "SELECTED"

The Alert



This beautiful Bugle call, *The Alert*, which is sounded as a mark of respect and calls the whole ship's company to attention, shall figure here as Last Salute to the *Tiger*

I think that certain very shrewd and true remarks made by T. E. Shaw (Lawrence) in a letter concerning Baring's style in poems of this sort (see p. 338), apply even more strikingly to *The Last Cruise of the Tiger* than to the Spencer Elegy which gave rise to them.

To continue the tale of omissions, in his charming Preface to Leslie Chaundy's bibliography Mr. Desmond MacCarthy regrets the absence of various early sonnets; and still more the fact that we are treated to only one specimen of the squibs, triolets, parodies and what not, that Baring tossed into the air of the 'nineties as easily as he puffed out cigarette smoke. And quite specially does he complain that in the three or four books of *Collected Essays* you may search in vain for the delightful *Immoral Stories for Children* of which I had never even heard. For, like the present writer, Mr. MacCarthy has a special appreciation of Baring's comic vein; and after declaring that he has far more faith in him as author than as editor, he remarks: "Baring belongs to that class of writers who scatter largess as they go on their way. He has a pocket which is never empty. At a particular moment it may contain only threepenny-bits; then it is a shower of these light little coins he throws. He is a serious author who does not think it necessary to be always serious; a writer who trusts that if his best is good, it will not suffer from neighbouring trivialities meant to amuse his friends and be forgotten."

But Mr. MacCarthy baulks at the idea of their being forgotten.

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True, they would be difficult to collect, having originally appeared in extraordinarily ephemeral newspapers started in the lightest hearted manner by Baring and his friends. Of one of these we have already spoken, *The North Street Gazette* which achieved only one number; and then there were *The Cambridge A.B.C.* and two little books of triolets printed by Baring and styled *Northcourt Nonsense*. In the hope that the publisher who served him so well in days when he was no great way up the ladder of fame may yet hunt down and publish these waifs and strays, let me give a few specimens. But being in the swing of pirating, I will first take leave to quote the fine peroration of Mr. MacCarthy's Preface.

"This is not the place," he says, "to undertake a serious critical estimate. Such a bibliography as this* is intended for those who already know what beauty, fun, good sense, shrewd criticism, wise sentiment, fantastic fancy his books contain; for those who have already taken into their favour a personality which pervades, without ever being obtrusive, the work of one of the most various of contemporary authors; of one who is a poet, novelist, essayist, dramatist, memoirist, war correspondent, critic and jester."

* * * * *

Two of Baring's jests are in *The Puppet Show*, the first of which was written when he was cramming with Mr. Tatham. Having been stung by a fly while dressing for dinner he sent the following triolet to his crammer by the maid:

Petition

May I wear a silk tie
Tonight at the table?
I've been stung by a fly,
May I wear a silk tie?
I will bind it as high
And as low as I'm able,
May I wear a silk tie
Tonight at the table?

* It stops at 1925.

POEMS: "COLLECTED" & "SELECTED"

And Mr. Tatham, who must have been a delightful man, at once sent up this answer:

The tie that you wear
May be wholly of silk
Or of stuff or mohair
The tie that you wear;
If the pain you can't bear
Better bathe it with milk.
The tie that you wear
May be wholly of silk.

Another Triolet is entitled:

On a Pig that was Run Over

I ran over a pig
And he quite seemed to like it,
It was in my new gig,
I ran over a pig.
It did not care a fig
Though I saw the wheel strike it.
I ran over a pig
And he quite seemed to like it.

Mrs. Gosse, wife of his friend Edmund Gosse, complained that the above poem was heartless, whereupon the following poem was sent her:

It did not care a fig
I am perfectly certain.
It was such a hard pig
It did not care a fig
For the wheel of the gig
Manufactured at Girton;
It did not care a fig
I am perfectly certain.

There is an inimitable poem in the style of his friend A. C. Benson called *Informes Hiemes reducit Jupiter* of which the first verse runs:

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The busy sun, laborious, large,
Above the trees is sinking slow;
The chilly fields, from marge to marge
Are white with complicated snow.

Really a parody on Arthur Benson's latest contribution to the *Cahier Jaune* (I used to wonder with irritation why this French title?), it is too long to quote here, but the last two of the ten verses must be given:

Alas! 'tis vain to catechise
The airy plans of Providence
Perchance in some far-off assize
We'll know the wherefore, why, and whence.

What though we miss the goal, the good,
And fringe the nearer sullen base,
And dare not utter as we would——
Two straight lines cannot hold a space.

Note the characteristically nebulous philosophy indicated in the last line, the analysis and precise meaning of which may be left to experts to determine. This particular waif and stray appeared in *The Cambridge A.B.C.* of which four numbers were printed in June 1894; after which its short life ended.

Finally must be mentioned a triolet, rescued from oblivion in *The Puppet Show*, for which I have a special weakness, so dramatic, so swift, so heartrending is its flight. At a Datchet regatta the poet and his friends began making triolets on the events that glided past their eyes, one being the spectacle of an evidently well-known young lady in manifest distress.

Oh! there's Lily Tarver
In oceans of tears,
Like streams of hot lava,
Oh! there's Lily Tarver!
The regatta's loud *brava*
Still rings in her ears.
Oh! there's Lily Tarver
In oceans of tears.

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The solitary specimen in this vein that figures among the *Collected Poems* is hidden away on the last page of the Lyrical part of the volume, and consists of twin triolets: one written in deep gloom on the Trans-Siberian Railway at 4 a.m.; the other in an access of recovered *joie de vivre* at 4.45 a.m. after the sun had risen. They are delightful and certainly better than nothing. But recurring to Mr. MacCarthy's threepenny-bits, I venture to say that sixpenn'orth of fun is not much in 357 pages, and many of his admirers are clamouring for more.

XI

THE POETICAL DRAMAS

ON POETICAL DRAMA: "THE BLACK PRINCE"—"GASTON DE FOIX"—
"DUSK"—"TRISTRAM AND ISEULT"—"MAHASENA"—"PROSERPINE"
(A MASQUE)

TWO-THIRDS of the volume of *Collected Poems* are taken up with five Poetical Dramas. This art-form seems to have appealed to Baring from the first, since between 1899 and 1920 he wrote no less than eight of them in the following order: *The Black Prince*, *Gaston de Foix*, *Dusk*, *Tristram and Iseult*, *Mahasena*, *Desiderio*, *Proserpine* (a Masque) and *Manfroy Duke of Athens*.

I am uncertain as to whether the author had or had not the question of their actability in view. At the time he was writing and planning a good many of them he was in intimate touch with Henry Brewster, a man of finest literary instinct but whose nature was not dramatic, and who in the case of these particular dramas would probably have considered stage-effect a negligible matter. (See his letter, p. 216.)

I confess I feel differently . . . more like Rogers the poet, who, when told by the late Lord Lytton that Browning had written another play, asked if it was a *reading* play or an *acting* play? and, when informed that it was a *reading* play said: "Then I shan't read it." Baring has described Oxford supper parties at the end of which edibles were used as missiles, ham being "slapped," butter hurled to the ceiling (where it stuck), and so much port thrown about that they had a special brand called "throwing port." Now when I have a play in my hand I at once begin thinking of how it will act; and if obviously badly, no matter what degree of poetical beauty informs the main idea

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and certain scenes, it comes for me a little in the category of "throwing port."

The Black Prince, written in 1899, belongs, I think, in this category, and as the line indicated in a letter from the author quoted on page 17 is exactly followed, further description is unnecessary. There are beautiful moments in this drama: the love scene in the garden before the Prince departs for the fatal Spanish campaign; his lonely despair in the Chapel, when, a stricken man, he prays that his heart, now a dead ember, may once more be kindled. A moving story, and a more tragic figure than this Black Prince cannot be conceived; yet to my mind the pathological element checks sympathy. You weary of the ups and downs of his illness; also of the devices of his mistress—apparently too stupid a woman to notice that her lover is ill—to sting his love into new life. In a word, I cannot imagine that even pulling together would turn *The Black Prince* into a good acting play, magnificent as is the subject. But I may be quite wrong.

If Edward the Black Prince was a man whom failing vitality landed prematurely in the grave, *Gaston de Foix* (1903) is of the exactly opposite type—one who deliberately seeks death because it seems to him a finer thing than life. The play is an embroidery on the philosophy of this exceedingly provoking hero. In it you find less character-drawing and more lay figures than in its predecessor. As in *The Black Prince*, the story is determined by the tiresome intervention of a soothsayer, and such action as there is takes place behind the scenes, and is posthumously related by spectators.

Gaston is a heroic youth whose steps are dogged by success; but his victories leave him cold because he was born with a hunger for death. He loves, but fears to declare himself, and the lady, who secretly returns his passion, rushes into matrimony because years ago yet another soothsayer had foretold that she will be the death of the man she loves. The husband selected is Gaston's best friend, and the post-nuptial love scene in Act II

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between her and Gaston, though fiery and unhampered by considerations of loyalty, is heavy with presage.

The husband is slain in battle, and in the last Act, after a great victory has been won by Gaston, the woman he loves appears on the field, hoping to counteract the death hunger which she has come to recognise and dread. But his reply is:

"My task is done
And Death has need of me. The time has come. . . .
To-day he meets me at the trysting place."

He then quite unnecessarily hurls himself at the head of fourteen followers on 1200 men, a fact we learn when his bleeding corpse is borne on to the stage. . . . (*Curtain.*)

I confess that, whether as plot or poetry, *Gaston de Foix* has always left me cold; but since reading the very moving book edited by T. E. Lawrence's brother entitled *T. E. Lawrence by his Friends*, one understands T. E. Shaw preferring this drama to *The Black Prince* (see his letter p. 339). And one begrudges neither him nor Gaston their escape from what they most dreaded, old age.

Pending the time when we arrive at a work written many years later, which, if manipulated by a man with stage-craft akin to Sardou's, could, I believe, become a real acting play—and a magnificent one—it is a comfort to turn to the next item of the series, this time legitimately banishing the concept "stage action" from one's mind. Why the word "play" is applied to works like *Dusk* and *Tristram and Iseult* (*Proserpine* is called a *Masque*, I am glad to say) is incomprehensible unless one argues on the lines of the horsedealer in *Punch*: "He ain't a comfortable hack, and he won't draw a cart, not even the water-cart. So as God Almighty can't have made him for nothing he must be a hunter." However, if one follows a suggestion of Brewster's and mentally calls them "dramatic poems" all is well.

To lovers of Gilbert and Sullivan, the next drama, *Dusk*, has an odd touch of "Iolanthe" about it, probably because it plays beside, and sometimes beneath, the waters of a lake. It is

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impossible to do justice in a synopsis to the delicate charm of this story. From the outset we are in a world of green, shimmering mystery, against the magic of which we do not strive. The mortals who pass on to the stage, and the tenants of the watery underworld of whom we catch glimpses in their own domain—on the surface of the lake, and on its banks—are blent together, harmonised, and accepted as we accept personages in a fairy tale.

Strange to relate, the texture of *Dusk* is more tightly woven, the language less honey-sweet than in its predecessors, and though (or is it because?) we are in fairyland, the fashioning of the *dramatis personae* is more vigorous. The hateful character of Jessamine is drawn with as sure a pencil as Mrs. Bucknell, her real-life counterpart in Baring's novel *C*—though in Mrs. Bucknell's case the cold, cruel lust of conquest is warmed up a little by a natural taste for sensual and sentimental excitement. And all the other figures—Peridure, Yvain and Robin the minstrel, whom Jessamine pretended to love and then, to be quit of them, caused to be slain—really live; even the light-minded water-sprites-in-waiting have a sort of flimsy characterisation about them.

Tristram and Iseult (1902)

Some time in the late 'nineties a writer called Bédier published a very lovely prose version of *Tristram and Iseult* into which he claimed to have welded genuine fragments of ancient manuscripts. Certainly the freshness of early morning hangs about this book, as about the beautiful version by Baring which it inspired.

I suppose endless changes can be rung on all great legends; and, as far as I remember, most of the variants which differentiate Baring's version from Wagner's great and final summing-up of this love story, had been adopted by Bédier; among them the wandering of the lovers in the woods, and Tristram's marriage with Iseult of Brittany (Iseult of the White Hands, as the old Chronicles call her).

In any case, nothing can be more moving than the version adopted by Baring, which opens at King Mark's Castle at Tintagel. Suspicion is already rife, for Iseult cannot hide her love

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for Tristram, and the lovers only meet by stealth at night in an orchard, whither, when all seems safe, Tristram summons his beloved by casting shreds of bark into a stream that empties itself into a marble basin in the Royal gardens.

One almost shrinks from the task of recounting in cold synopsis the dream-like succession of events in this story, that from the outset holds you with its tender pathos. On one occasion Andret—Tristram's enemy, the equivalent of Wagner's Modred—persuades the King to watch the orchard; but Iseult catches sight of his shadow as he creeps through the moonlit wood, and as she greets Tristram invents such a plausible reason for their meeting, that after their departure the King is left thanking God for the baselessness of his suspicions.

But another night, presuming on the King's supposed absence, Tristram visits the Queen in her chamber. They are discovered. Tristram is condemned to death, but escapes; and by and by Iseult steals from the Court and joins him in the woods, where they live a hunted life, feeding on herbs and berries, shelterless in the winter but for the hospitality of a Holy Hermit, yet willing to endure all things rather than separation. Many a time has the hermit secretly reproached Tristram for bringing her he loves to such a plight, and finally, after warning him of his intention, he leads King Mark to their hiding-place. Iseult, forgiven, consents to return to Tintagel, and Tristram departs to take up his knightly existence in a foreign land.

And now comes the haunting episode of Tristram's union with the daughter of the Duke of Brittany, "Iseult of the White Hand." The figure of this child, passionately enamoured of the grave, sad-eyed stranger-Knight who has rendered such signal service to her father, and always hoping one day to win his love, cannot but move us. He weds her, but pleads that, according to a vow made to the Blessed Virgin who once saved him in dire peril on the battlefield, a whole year must pass ere he may give and take the wedding kiss.

Then, torn by intolerable longing, he goes to Tintagel, disguised as a madman. The Queen recognises him at once,

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and before he is thrown out by the servants whom he is beating, she contrives to give him a ring, promising that if it be sent to her in time of need she will come to him.

Tristram then returns to Brittany. One day he is slightly wounded in fighting the Duke's enemies. To his wife he makes light of the wound, but perceiving that the sword was poisoned and that he must die, he summons his only confidant, Sir Kay Hedijs, gives him the ring, and sends him over the sea to Iseult of Cornwall. If his mission is successful let the ship hoist a white sail; a black sail will mean that Iseult is not with him.

Alas! the young wife, concealed behind an arras, has heard all. The days pass; Tristram's fever waxes fiercer and fiercer; he entreats her to watch from the balcony for a ship he has sent across the sea to fetch the only herb that can cure him. If the messenger has found and is bringing it, a white sail will be hoisted; if not, a black sail. She sees a ship approaching, and overwhelmed by a passion of jealousy tells him the sail is black.

Tristram turns his face to the wall and dies. Iseult of Cornwall enters, bids the other Iseult leave his bedside, lies down beside him, kisses his mouth and face, and clasping him closely she gives up her soul.

I find it impossible to comment here on what can be so easily, so quickly read by whoever chooses. But I should like to quote what Henry Brewster wrote to me the night Baring read him the play, because it so exactly expresses my own feeling.

Rome, 12th Nov. /02.

. . . Baring came last night to dinner and afterwards read me *Tristram and Iseult*. The best word I can find for it is . . . delightful. Attention is reveted at once; you can neither say when nor how it happened, but you are floating quietly in blue space, and you cannot even hear the flapping of the wings. It doesn't seem to matter much what happens; you are as willing to go to the right as to the left when you glide through the air with such exquisite ease and the sky is a haze of gold. . . .

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Myself I think that Baring has never done better than in this dramatic poem.

Mabasena (1904) is another of those plays of which the main-spring seems to me too weak to drive the watch—or perhaps not the sort of spring that should be asked to drive a watch at all; a spring put to a wrong purpose. In any case, finding the story unattractive and its handling not such as atones, I will not attempt a summary, particularly as the end seems to me so nebulous that I cannot determine to which quarter the moral-weathercock is supposed to be pointing (but, again I say it, that may be my fault).

There are, as in all these dramas, moments of great beauty and interest, such as *Mabasena's* powerful arraignment of cruel gods who imprison the souls of men in weak flesh, bind them on fiery wheels of fate, and throw them into the world "to spin like whirling-tops that children lash to madness."

But *Mabasena* is less like a play than ever.

Prosperpine (a Masque) (1908)

Years ago when I first read this Masque, its mysterious beauty seized me, but I had forgotten the perfection of its working out. I also believe that, with manipulation of one particular scene, a little foreshortening here and there, and the mighty help of music, which is the birthright of every Masque, the spectacular effect might be overwhelming.

Visualise a grove encircled by the purple mountains one sees in Sicily; on one side, backed by cypresses, a Doric temple, on the other gently rising ground. The grass is bright with spring flowers, and maidens are crossing it, and passing with song into the Temple.

Watching them is a Prince who has paused on his way to the neighbouring Court of King Pharamond whose daughter he is to wed. From one of the maidens, Lily of the Valley, he learns that the Temple has long since been deserted and that the village-folk

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shun the spot, to which dark legends cling—tales of hauntings and sorcery. Strange lights burn in the Temple at night, and he who lingers here after sunset falls under the deadly spell of Queen Proserpine and dies untimely. It is also said that at midnight, on Midsummer Eve, the faery people worship her and that mortals who behold these mysteries die within the year. A light-hearted village girl, Rosaline by name, had dared to watch the shadowy dance and they fear that evil may befall her. But for themselves, slaves of Proserpine, they have no fear, knowing that she is favourable to their ministry.

Rosemary now comes out of the Temple, and stands singing on the steps—a stranger, Lily tells the Prince, who came with the wild tulips in the spring they know not whence. She loves the Temple, decks it daily with flowers, and sleeps untroubled in its dreadful courts. All love her for her gentle ways, for the great liquid depths of her dark eyes, for the flutelike sadness of her song, and for something sacred there is about her—a secret majesty, a royal fervour.

As Lily goes into the Temple she warns the Prince that the dangerous twilight hour is at hand; but he, gazing at Rosemary, cannot tear himself away. Presently Rosemary comes down the steps, and in the course of the exquisite duologue that follows she tells him that though the gods have been dethroned and cast out of heaven, they will ever find a dwelling place on earth:

“So long as men shall live, and men shall die,
So long in majesty shall Proserpine
Await their shades beyond the Stygian stream.”

The Prince answers that though all the world should turn to other gods, he will worship none but Proserpine, for she alone can bestow the great reprieve, the sleep that has no end. But Rosemary tells him that if the sleep is endless, endless too is the dream. At this point the Prince's squire enters and urges his master to proceed on his way, and as they depart the Prince begs Rosemary to say a prayer to the goddess for a stranger who lingered for a twilight hour and rode away into the night to

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return no more—but we know that the spell is on him and that he will return. As the two men walk up the slope Rosemary sings:

“I came with the swallow and with the swallow I go,
Nevermore shall I see you, friend;
Softly over whatever was here the waters flow,
The evening has come, and the end.”

As the travellers disappear behind the hill, a chorus of voices is heard singing in the Temple. The moon rises and lights up the figure of Rosemary, which all at once becomes spectral and majestic. A silver halo shines round her head, and a crown of red flowers is in her hair.

The next scene is in Pharamond's palace where the preparations for the wedding rite are complete. The Prince is pale, but paler still the Princess, his bride, for astrologers have foretold disaster and entreated that the marriage be delayed. But the King, brushing aside these “sick fancies,” has commanded the procession to form.

Suddenly another very different procession advances . . . white-robed youths and maidens bearing on a bier the body of the hapless Rosaline. They pass, chanting a dirge and scattering flowers on the corpse. Then a single voice is heard singing:

“I came with the swallow and with the swallow I go,
Nevermore shall I see you, friend;
Softly over whatever was here the waters flow,
The evening has come, and the end.

“The hemlock flute in the spring and the grasshoppers' song
For ever shall sound in your dream;
My dream is dark, my dream is silent, my dream is long
By the reeds of the sable stream.”

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The Prince starts, and, like a man bewitched, follows the procession and disappears. The Princess turns pale, the King and the courtiers stare after him in silent amazement. A cloud comes over the face of the sun. In the distance the funeral chant and the high piping of flutes die away.

* * * * *

Act II plays in front of the Temple as before. It is now Summer; again the maidens are passing to their ministry, this time singing of Rosaline, wondering if she is contented among the dead. The Prince has come in with them, walking, as in the last act, like one in a dream, and stands outside the Temple.

A group of country people enter, one of whom, a juggler, evidently represents the devil. Most of them are jeering at religion, but one, an old man, tells of the yearly tournament held at Pharamond's court, at which Death, clad in grisly armour, answers the challenge of any mortal who dares fight with him. But before the challenger can hope for victory, he must have killed in his heart all love of life; and so far not one has succeeded in this combat. Thus talking, all move on save the Prince who is half-concealed, and a shepherd who presently is joined by his sweetheart, Heartsease; interlaced, the two go up into the hills.

And now, at the sight of these lovers, a rush of longing for earthly happiness comes over the Prince: why should he not go back to the world where soft eyes and sweet lips are waiting for him, and forget his melancholy dream? . . . The maidens come out of the Temple, and pass out of sight. . . . Last of all comes Rosemary. She looks at him . . . and lust of life dies in his heart for ever.

Follows a strangely moving scene. He now knows that all his life he has loved her and learns that he is the only man she has ever loved. Yet she urges him to leave her, for the sole mortal it is permitted her to love is the man who shall challenge Death and vanquish him. If he fails he will pass to oblivion, lost to her for evermore . . . as have fought for her, and fallen, many knights. The outcome of this scene, which is too full of

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mysterious beauty to be mutilated, is that he tells her he will challenge Death and come off victorious. Then she paints for him the beauty of this world of ours from which she is loth to tear him away; he replies that all he craves is the silence of the world she dwells in, the scentless slumber-laden flowers, the woods unvexed by noise of wings; he needs only the sights mirrored in her eyes, the place where there is no more life, no more death, only love for all eternity.

As the scene closes we realise that, so far, the Prince has no distinct idea of what his reward will be if he follows her, but is willing to go with her blindly. And now comes a very Baringesque touch. As the curtain falls the voice of Heartsease is heard among the trees:

"He had forgot the ancient sign,
And heedless he passed by
The garden where a year ago
We watched the swallows fly.

"I heard him whistle in the lane,
I watched him from my bed,
I saw him pass the garden gate . . .
He did not turn his head."

* * * * *

In the final Act it is autumn, late in the afternoon; the ground is strewn with fallen leaves and the maidens are wailing on the steps of the Temple, for Rosemary has disappeared. Last night a shepherd had seen a hooded maiden carrying branches; she wore a sable robe, and her pale brow was garlanded with poppies, but none will allow that this could have been Rosemary.

The rough company of Act II now appears again and the old man has great news. The Tournament of Life and Death was fought at Pharamond's Court yesterday, and at last Death has been vanquished, the victor being an unknown Knight who took the laurel-wreath handed him by the Princess without even looking at her and left the lists. Whereupon the Princess fell in a swoon.

While the company are laughing and joking about this incident

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the shadows fall; Lily of the Valley thinks she hears Rosemary's voice; the mists of night seem full of strange shapes; Lily drives the men away: "It is not good for mortals to be here; you will offend immortal Proserpine," and lastly she herself goes into the temple crying: "Give us back our Rosemary!"

Proserpine walks from the cypresses on to the steps in her true shape, in all her glory and majesty, clothed in dark draperies and wearing a wreath of scarlet poppies. The mist turns into the Ghosts of the Dead, who now rise and bow down before her, singing a chorus of which the first verse is:

"The swallow seeks the southern land again,
The trees, all save the cypress and the pine,
Are splashed and dyed with autumn's crimson stain;
Come back unto thy dead, Queen Proserpine!"

The Prince appears. Overwhelmed by her majesty he kneels and lays before her his laurel wreath and the helm and plumes of Death. If the former duologue was strange and moving, what follows here is the apex of the story, and, I think, of its verbal beauty. He now learns what he has to hope for if he follows her. She reminds him that in her pale kingdom, seated on a pillared throne, she will be far from him; that he must dwell among the myriads of the dead who may not ever see her face. And though he, and he alone, will be allowed "unforgetful to gaze on Proserpine," is this enough?

The Prince replies that to behold her changeless face and dwell for ever in the shadow and the stillness of her soul is all the recompense he asks:

"I shall be one with your wide majesty
And with your mute and dark dominion one;
One with your pale, your glimmering loveliness,
One with your sorrow, endless and divine,
One with the vastness of your silver dream,
One with your deeps of silence infinite,
And one with your eternal life in death . . .
And I shall share the sorrow of your dream,
And you shall feel my infinite desire."

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And when Proserpine urges that still they will be eternally asunder and apart, he answers:

“And yet my soul shall, like a drop of dew,
Dwell in the inmost petals of your soul.”

And she, as though completing his thought, once more repeats:

“Eternally asunder and yet near . . .
Together, though eternally apart. . . .”

Then comes an unexpected turn at which the hearts of some readers will quake as they did when first they heard the sad and beautiful story of Proserpine, or listened to the fragment of it retold in Gluck's divine language—a turn no one but Baring would have thought of. It would seem as if the Prince's decision were irrevocably taken, but Proserpine will not have it so. She gives him an apple and a pomegranate, and bids him “await on earth the footfall of the Spring.” Let him once more drink in the awakening beauty of this world, and if smiling life seems sweet to him and holds him, he is to taste the golden apple. But if on that day he should still crave the dark, the silence, the sorrow of her dream, let him taste the pomegranate.

The Prince asks what his fate will be if he chooses the apple? She replies:

You shall forget the dream of Proserpine
And live contented in the world of men.
And with the Spring I shall return once more
And I shall love you with a mortal's love
And you shall love me with a mortal's love——
With all a mortal's ecstasy of love,
With all a mortal's swift forgetfulness.
And when the summer dies, and I once more
Return to the dark realm, you shall forget,
And fancy free shall seek and find new joy.

THE PRINCE: And if I taste the other darker fruit,
Will you return with the advancing Spring?

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PROSERPINE: I shall be unaware of earth and spring,
I shall forget the vision of the world,
I shall have found the dream I sought on earth;
And lost and drowned in my eternal dream
I nevermore shall seek the earth in Spring.

Then the dead lift their voices and remind her that it is time for her to return to her Kingdom. Bidding the Prince farewell, once more charging him to await the coming of the Spring, she walks into the Temple—and that is the end.

* * * * *

In this masque Baring re-awakes in one's heart the passionate pity that rent it in our youthful days when first we learnt what had befallen Proserpine in that sulphurous Sicilian plain near Castrogiovanni, where, alas! in 1904 we could find no flowers! But the end as it is here—I mean the stage direction which gives no hint as to what the Prince's eventual choice will be—puzzled me.

Baring is fond of planting a query in our minds as he leaves us. Sometimes one thinks this is delicacy—the celebrated “pedigree reserve”—at others pure puckishness. So I wrote to ask him how he thinks the Prince will have decided? He answered that according to the original reading, as Proserpine enters the Temple the Prince tastes the pomegranate and sinks asleep on the steps, never to wake again. But so distressed was Brewster at the rejection of the apple (he would have been!) that Baring decided to leave it an open question!

Myself I emphatically prefer the original end, all the more because the goddess had urged him not lightly to leave this beautiful world of ours. And personally I am convinced the Prince decided for the pomegranate, and that Proserpine, having found what she had so long sought for vainly on earth, is now at rest.

It is amusing to reflect how differently two very different minds evoke paganism; Anatole France, for instance, in *Saint Saire* and

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then this! And as final reflection I cannot help wishing that Vaughan Williams, whose religious sense is, I think, rather of the same quality as Baring's, could get hold of *Proserpine*. What a wonderful thing this Masque would then become!

XII

"MANFROY DUKE OF ATHENS"

Manfroy Duke of Athens (1920).

(Published in 1923 in the volume *His Majesty's Embassy*.)

To my mind this poetical drama, the last Baring has written, belongs in a category by itself. Here he not only reaches his greatest height as poet, but were the play re-cast for the stage by a clever craftsman, this dramatic and terrible story would surely come into its own as stage-play. Probably it would have to be cut—nearly all plays are the better for cutting, I believe (so are operas), but as reader, one would unwillingly spare a single line.

I have not concealed my opinion, such as it is, that some of these poetical dramas would not lend themselves to stage treatment. Other people who have read them may have come to the same conclusion; which would help to explain why *Manfroy*—in its *conception* pre-eminently an acting play, so one would think—should not have been published till years after it was written, and why many have not heard of its existence to this day.

But as no work of Baring's attracts and moves me more powerfully, I will not deny myself the pleasure of doing it such homage here as the world has readily accorded to other works of his—*The Puppet Show*, for instance, or *C*, or *Unreliable History*.

Here at last you have characters that are as strongly drawn and stand out as clearly as castles, churches, or mountains. The story is as powerful as it is original. Manfroy, spoilt child of fortune, counsellor and favourite of the Duke of Athens, inflexibly honest, loyal, proud, and self-sufficing, is a superman who lives without hope of Heaven or fear of Hell. And when the jester Chichibio warns him that he has enemies—especially a certain Demetrius who owes his position at Court to Manfroy, poses as his friend,

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and is secretly plotting his ruin—Manfroy declines to harbour suspicion, adding that, come what may, he who is master of his soul is forearmed against any blow of fate.

Here occurs the first of three visits from a mysterious Friar who claims to have been sent by God to ask for Manfroy's soul. Like Chichibio, he warns him that some day he may be caught in the net of circumstance, and urges that, could he but humble himself and allow that man is powerless to stand upright without God's help, much anguish and misery would be spared him. His pleading is of course in vain, but finally the Duke promises, scoffing, that should the day come when he acknowledges God's existence and prays for mercy, then let the Friar return, for then his request will be granted.

* * * * *

And now misfortune after misfortune overtakes Manfroy. His wife, whom he loves, leaves him and their little son, and flies with a lover; ships that carry his whole fortune find the bottom of the sea; and finally, Demetrius's plot succeeds, and Manfroy, who is too proud to defend himself, is sentenced to a traitor's death. But the Duke, not fully persuaded of his guilt and remembering his great services to the State, revokes the death-sentence and sends him to the galleys.

* * * * *

Among his new companions, Manto, as he now calls himself, is considered a desperado, but all perceive that he is of finer clay than themselves. The scene in the galley, the songs of the galley-slaves are haunting and terrible. One day they touch at Cyprus almost simultaneously with a ship that is conveying the beautiful Alathiel, daughter of the King of Babylon, to Athens, where she is to marry a kinsman of the Duke. And the Athenian noble who is responsible for her safety on the journey is Demetrius, now the Duke's favourite and inheritor of Manfroy's honours.

A Cypriot nobleman catches sight of Alathiel at the port, falls madly in love with her, and offers the Captain of the Galley untold

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sums for a man desperate and bold enough to undertake a dangerous task. The Captain sends Manto to the noble, who promises him his freedom if he will kill Demetrius and bring Alathiel to his house. Manto replies that though a galley slave he is not a hired assassin and rejects the proposal with scorn.

At this moment the Friar appears for the second time and reiterates his demand, to which Manto answers that even less than in the days of his prosperity is he prepared to worship a deity who permits the triumph of treachery and lying; and once more he tells the Friar that he has no use for his prayers, his inhuman creed, or his God. “I shall come to you once more,” says the Friar, “and then you will be ready to redeem your promise. Till that day, farewell!”

Manto returns to the galley which hurriedly leaves the island. Shortly afterwards a terrible storm causes it to founder on the coast of Greece, and Manto, escaping, joins a band of brigands.

So far, throughout the play it is borne in on us that *Manfroy*, as we may now call him, is keenly alive to the influences of art, of nature, of beauty in every form, and in this brigand life he tastes perfect peace and happiness. Sitting outside the brigands’ cave, “Holy Friar” (he cries),

“You should be here! I need no cloistered walls.
All nature shall be my Basilica,
The sea my chanting choir, the mountain tops
The pillars of the aisle, the evening star
My taper, and the sun and moon my censers,
Swinging the fragrant scents of eve and dawn;
My prayer the wordless fellowship I feel
With nature’s ministers, and with the hearts
Of my rude hosts. May nothing come to mar
The harmony of my contentedness.”

But the tragedy on which the play hinges is close at hand. It appears that the same storm which wrecked the galley drove the ship astray that was carrying Princess Alathiel to Greece. They

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made a bay, and finding as best they could the way to Athens, had been waylaid by brigands. Demetrius had fled, leaving the Princess in their hands; two of the brigands have been sent to Athens to demand her ransom, and pending their return, the Princess, described by forerunners as of surpassing beauty, is to be put under the charge of Manfroy, who, also in this company, is felt to be no ordinary man.

Alathiel appears and we are in presence of a spell such as was cast by Helen of Troy—a spell that robs men of their reason. Manfroy, the man who claimed to be captain of his soul, is instantly swept over the edge. Perhaps, feeling what is coming, it is in order to win her confidence that he tells her who he is; and truly his first bewildered words of admiration might have been taken—as the Princess decides to take them—for the stammerings of a man whose balance has been shaken by past suffering.

I will give almost the whole of a duologue about which there is a very curious quality. True, as Chichibio once warned him might happen to any man, “the devil had stabbed his heart with desire, sweet as honey and fierce as fire”; yet the violence of Manfroy’s passion seems to have laid his soul open to the wild beauty of the mountain landscape, to have drenched it with the soft light peculiar to the starry firmament in those climes; and we feel that every one of the spirits that linger about the door of a poet’s imagination has unimpeded access to Manfroy’s soul and is speeding him to his doom.

Outside the cave. Enter Manfroy.

MANFROY: The sinking sun the mountain tops has kissed;
They glow like amethyst;
The quiet sea grows dim,
And far away upon its blazing rim
Shines the white canvas of an argosy;
Haply she sails from isles unvisited
Or from the solemn harbours of the dead;
From Tyre or Carthage or forgotten Troy,
Or from the fields of joy,

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The orchards of Hesperides,
The jewels of unfooted seas.
May be she is the ship that bore the spoil,
The price of unimaginable toil,
Robbed from the Colchian shore
By wise Medea's lore.
Perchance a phantom galley bringing home
Ulysses freed at last from wind and foam;
Perchance the ship that bore
Unhappy Helen to her native shore;
Helen, the matchless, faithless bride
For whom the old and young ungrudging died; . . .
She never died, she wanders still
Here, on this flowery hill;
She has been born again, or else her ghost
Has sought this coast
To rob me of my rest. (*Enter ALATHIEL*)
See, in the golden west
How royal is her tread;
How like a dewy flower her nodding head!
She comes this way,
Outsweetening the last breath of dying day . . .
Princess Alathiel, hail!

ALATHIEL: Good sir, your cheek is pale.

MANFROY: I am still weary after troubled days,
My mind is clouded with a haze . . .

As the scene goes on, Manfroy is ever trembling on the verge of saying what must not be said, and one suspects that Alathiel perceives it and is trying to turn his thoughts into another channel . . .

ALATHIEL: I hail this quiet hour;
The shepherd leads his flock to rest,
And though the grass still shines like sombre gold,
And woolly cattle glimmer white and cold,
It is too dark to see
The shepherd. . . . Hark! a bird!
Her voice has stirred.
The rustling leaves of yonder tree. . . .

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MANFROY: It is a downy owl
With hooded cowl
Hooting his plaintive note.

ALATHIEL: And from the valleys float
Echoes of song.

MANFROY: Oh! youth is brief and sorrow overlong! . . .

ALATHIEL: Look! in the fields below the fireflies light
Their lamps; they glisten thick and bright.

MANFROY: Brief is the summer night
And sick at heart am I.

ALATHIEL: My lord, why so?

MANFROY: I hear the stealthy hour when we must part. . . .
Would we had never met!
Each word you speak
Has pierced me like a sword;
The spirit fails me and the flesh is weak;
Since you have filled my firmament,
Most holy and most excellent,
And dazzled me with sorcery,
I drift on a delirious sea. . . .
Sail, sail away with me
To isles of bliss
Or blue Neapolis;
Across untrampled seas
To the Hesperides,
And I will be your captain and your guide,
Your lord, your lover and your knight,
And you shall be my bride,
My holy joy, my good delight,
Ah! I will serve you well
Divine Alathiel!

ALATHIEL: Sir, it is haply true
That toil, mishap and pain
Have sorely shaken you
And troubled your sick brain.
I am Alathiel,
The true affianced bride
Of Algarvé, you know it well;
I have no thoughts for anyone beside . . .

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Your words have vexed me sore.
I pray you, sir, to trouble me no more.

MANFROY: My words were born of ecstasy,
Forgive me, most divine princess,
And pity my distress;
But let me still thy servant be,
In mute humility:
I vow henceforth you need not fear
One vexing word to hear . . .
Forgive me, proud Princess Alathiel.

ALATHIEL: It is forgotten, sir; good night, Farewell.

* * * * *

Alas! Manfroy has promised more than he is able to perform. You have come to respect this unlovable man, who, on the rack for years, is too noble to gain freedom by slaying his enemy, and who is now confronted by a temptation he no longer has strength to resist. It is, I think, one of the author's triumphs so to have wrought characters and events that, as in the Greek Drama, and as in Napoleon's journey to Russia to meet his doom, you accept what happens as the work of Destiny. "Faint with unassuaged and unavailing fire," Manfroy, who once laughed to scorn the petty passions of mortals, lays a devilish plot. The return of the messengers to Athens being somewhat delayed, he persuades Alathiel that the brigands are playing her false; and promises that if she will steal forth at dead of night—he having previously drugged her guard—and come to his cave, he will lead her by a secret path to Athens.

She comes; he begs her to drink a stirrup cup to their safe journey; the wine is drugged; she sinks back insensible; he works his will on her, and then carries her unconscious form back to her own cave. And when, next morning, knowing nothing of what has happened, her brain still dizzy from the drug, believing that she has overslept herself, she summons him and asks if it is now too late to start, he replies that it is indeed too late . . . that now she is for ever his.

Then the messengers come back from Athens, not only bringing

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Alathiel's ransom but the news that Demetrius, sentenced to death for leaving her to her fate, has confessed that Manfroy had been wrongfully condemned. And now the Duke commands his presence in order to reinstate him in all his honours. Without addressing a word to Manfroy, Alathiel begs for an escort to conduct her forthwith to Athens, and there to take her unobserved to a nunnery where the Abbess awaits her. Thus closes the third Act.

* * * * *

The fourth Act plays in Athens some seventeen years later. Manfroy is now Duke of Athens; Sister Monica, once Princess Alathiel, is hidden away in the convent that years ago had given her sanctuary. Possibly Manfroy is aware that she had there born a daughter, subsequently adopted by a childless Athenian lady, Dianora by name, but he has persuaded himself that Alathiel is long since dead.

Manfroy's son Palamon is a gentle youth of great beauty and promise whom his father adores. So far he has been fancy-free, but Manfroy's only friend, Lysimachus, remarks that behind a quiet mask the boy conceals a world of passion. "Not that he is deceitful, but, like his father, he curbs his passions and controls his appetites."

But Palamon's hour has come. He has seen at Mass a beautiful maiden called Calista; they fall in love with each other, and in the absence from Athens of her adopted mother, they meet and plight their troth. Manfroy, to whom Palamon has confided his love story, bids him bring the maiden to see him; as she enters he swoons, believing for one wild moment that she is the wronged Alathiel.

He instantly guesses the girl's parentage; none the less, summoned to her convent by Sister Monica, and learning that Calista is indeed his daughter, he declares that for him the laws of Nature take precedence of the ordinances of an imaginary God. Brushing aside her horrified protest, undaunted by her threat that what he did in secret shall be cried upon the housetops

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to an affrighted world, he swears that the marriage shall take place.

Then Sister Monica grasps at the only means she can devise of preventing this crime; she tells Calista the whole story, and lays upon her the terrible task of breaking her troth with Palamon, but without telling him the true reason:

CALISTA (*kneeling*): I will obey.

O Queen of Heaven, pray for Palamon.

SISTER MONICA: Pray day and night to God to save your father—
And sometimes say a pitiful prayer for me.

The result is a terrible scene between Manfroy and Palamon, who now declares there can be only one explanation of Calista's refusal to marry him. She says she no longer loves him; then it must be that she loves another. And when Manfroy, aware too late that forces he cannot control are arrayed against him, urges resignation, the same spirit that led to the supreme crime of his life flares up in this gentle son of his. ‘‘I will possess Calista,’’ he cries, raving, ‘‘whatever be the means—and if it be death to me, to her, or to us both. I will drench my hands in blood, betray my dearest friends, sell my honour or my immortal soul.’’ And when Manfroy tries to calm him, reminding him that according to his belief she loves another, he cries: ‘‘What if she love ten thousand others? *To-night Calista shall be mine,*’’—with which words he storms away.

* * * * *

The fifth and final Act is, I think, very original, and speaking as a child in matters such as last acts of spoken drama, it seems to me that, if re-wrought, it should be terrifyingly moving and effective.

It opens with an interview between Manfroy and an old peasant who pleads for the life of his son, Gnotho, condemned for the frolic of a youth inflamed with wine, the shooting of a wild swan in the Royal Park. He pleads in vain. Manfroy maintains that the law must take its course.

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The scene changes to Calista's bedroom. Night has fallen; Palamon creeps in by a secret door; Calista lies motionless, speechless, on her bed, and it gradually dawns on him that she is dead. Hearing his cries the maid enters and tells how yesterday Calista had been stricken by fever, how towards evening the fever had died down, and, as the maid believed, sleep had come to her at last. But it was death. She had sent a message to the nuns, and even now was searching for tapers. These lighted, she ushers in Manfroy, who, overcome with foreboding, had begged Sister Monica to meet him at Dianora's house and help him to save Calista.

She comes, finds her daughter is dead, and turning on Palamon launches a terrible denunciation of his father:

"His honours and his titles are a mask
That hides a cancerous leprosy within.
This virtuous Duke just seventeen years ago
Did to me what you would have done to her
Had God not interposed a pitiful hand.
And she, Calista, who is lying there,
Stainless Calista whom you both have slain
Is mine—my daughter! There her father stands!
Leave us most wretched men, and ask of God
Forgiveness for the evil you have done.
Leave us—for I alone shall keep this vigil."

* * * * *

It is the next scene that strikes me as so curious and unexpected—the scene in which the last wall of the edifice called Manfroy crumbles.

It is morning and Manfroy is alone with two young peasants, Gnotho and his friend Cimbrio, who had contrived Gnotho's escape from prison and had tried to personate him on the scaffold. The fraud had been discovered and the execution postponed. But when the Duke promises to pardon him if he will reveal his motives in thus acting, Cimbrio scornfully refuses: what is the use, he asks, of offering an explanation to one who is

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incapable of understanding it? And now for the first time in his life Manfroy's mask is torn away by this peasant. "You are acclaimed by the great ones of the earth" (Cimbrio says), "and smothered with flattery; but the common people know better—know you are a sham, a hypocrite; they despise you to such a degree that one would rather die than take a favour from your hand. People call you Manfroy the good, Manfroy the wise, Manfroy the just; but we of the gutter know you are Manfroy the proud, Manfroy the pharisee, Manfroy the evil, Manfroy the damned."

At this point I will quote verbatim from the play:

A procession of monks, led by the Friar, passes along the street facing the loggia of Manfroy's room. A priest and a boy bearing a taper and ringing a bell walk in front. They pass along out of sight, walking into the house. Enter the FRIAR. There is a moment's pause and from the belfry of a Church in the street a bell rings three times—and after a pause, three times again.

MANFROY (*looking at the FRIAR and kneeling*): Have mercy on me, miserable sinner!

FRIAR: I come to claim fulfilment of your promise; your soul is mine to give to God Almighty!

MANFROY: May He receive it and be merciful! . . . But to what sick or dying man, good Friar, bring they the body of Christ?

FRIAR: It is for you.

MANFROY: For me? My life new-born has just begun; a malefactor has unsealed my eyes. (*To CIMBRIO.*) Cimbrio, you are pardoned.

CIMBRIO: I have said that I would take no gift from you, Duke Manfroy, but you shall take a fatal gift from me. (*CIMBRIO stabs him.*)

THE CROWD: Help, help! the Duke, the Duke! They murder him!

FRIAR: Carry him to a couch; he is not dead. (*They carry the DUKE away.*)

In the next and final scene the Duke lies on his bed, dying; at his bedside are Palamon and the two only friends he possesses, Chichibio and Lysimachus. He bids them ask Cimbrio and

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Gnotho to accept their pardon, "as from a dying man," and charges Palamon to go to the convent when all is over and tell Sister Monica that he died remorseful for a life of sin, at the last reconciled and shriven. And on his tomb they are to write:

"Here lies
A man who sinned, whom Satan thought to take,
But whom our Master pitied and gave him grace."

His mind now wanders. While Monica has entered and kneels down beside Palamon, thinking he is on the galley he pleads for mercy, occasionally uttering snatches of the song we heard the galley-slaves sing at Cyprus:

"Good Sir, we need no blows for loitering,
We're faint, and if you beat us we shall die. . . .
The lightnings have destroyed our ship, she founders . . .
With hey, with ho, and we are free to drown!
O save me from the business of the dark! . . .
Save me, I perish, Jesu, Mary . . . Peace."

THE END.

Whether in telling the story of *Manfroy Duke of Athens* and quoting a few paragraphs here and there, I have conveyed some faint idea of the power, the pity, the penetrating poetic charm of the drama, I do not know. Anyhow, the attempt has been made with an idea of exhibiting the author's tragic insight wrought into a beauty that achieves what Aristotle says should be the aim of all tragedy—the purging of the soul. Here are displayed, as on a palette, colours presently to be worked into a remarkable series of novels, which, playing in the most sophisticated department of modern life, the Great World, seethe below the surface with passions as wild as those of Baring's poetic dramas, whether as handled by him twenty years earlier with the rather loose grip of a neophyte, or, as in *Manfroy*, with the self-mastery of a mature artist.

XIII

"WHAT I SAW IN RUSSIA"

WE owe Baring's publishers a debt of gratitude for issuing in a single large-print volume of 440 pages a condensed version of three of his most important works on Russia, viz., *With the Russians in Manchuria* (1904-5), *A Year in Russia* (1905-6, this being the most momentous epoch in Russian political history), and a book of *Russian Essays and Studies* which appeared singly at intervals during the following years up to 1914.

I should like to call attention to a couple of points in connection with Baring's studies on Russia.

He himself says in his preface (written, I think, in 1927): "The Russia here described is now a thing of the past," and certainly most of the Russian news that reaches us seems to bear out that remark. But is it wholly true?

Take one point only, religion. In some amusing articles in *Time and Tide*, describing a recent voyage of discovery in present-day Russia, Miss Delafield tells us that in the schools she visited the children laughed merrily at the idea of anyone believing in God—much as enlightened infants in our schools might laugh at West Highland infants for believing in fairies (if they do). And Miss Delafield sorrowfully remembered the remark attributed to the Jesuits: "Give us a child for seven years; after that anyone may have him."

On the other hand, I heard Mr. Baring say recently that if he were to go back to Russia to-day he fancied he would find the people unchanged. And only the other day a correspondent of (I think) the *Daily Telegraph*, reporting on the Christmas and New Year celebrations at Moscow, was amazed to see that such churches as still exist were absolutely crammed with old, middle-

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aged, and young worshippers, and that the atmosphere was, if anything, more passionately devotional than ever. Reading which, I recalled Baring's remark about the malleable yet stubborn character of this people as illustrated by their bearing at the casting of the bell, and wondered if 300 millions of people can be changed in a few decades by the action of ever so powerful an oligarchy?

The second point I want to make cannot very well be made by Baring himself; but seeing what an amount of time and thought he has given to Russia it is natural to enquire into his qualifications as chronicler. In *My Russian Memories*, Sir Bernard Pares, who, I am told, is the greatest living authority on the subject, underlines again and again that Baring has "a more intimate and profound understanding of Russia" than any Englishman he has ever known. Indeed, in a letter to M. Louis Chaigne, author of the little Baring biography I spoke of, Sir Bernard goes farther, and declares that even among Russians none displays greater knowledge of the peasant, the soldier, or the workman than this Englishman.

He speaks, too, of a certain prophetic gift that enabled Baring on more than one occasion to foretell the future.

For instance, Sir Bernard relates that in 1906, when the session of the first Duma had reached its utmost tension, Baring astonished him by saying that Russia had become "quite uninteresting for the time being," and that he was going home. This was after those three nights spent travelling to and fro between St. Petersburg and Moscow, in the course of which he had satisfied himself that if the Duma dissolved no one would care two pins; and two weeks later the event proved how correctly he had diagnosed public indifference. Again in an article written in 1907 he declared that not for another ten years would anyone know what the disruption then beginning would end in; he was only a year out, the date of the revolution being 1916. The result was that after the dissolution of the second Duma (1907) he lost interest in Russian political movements.

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But Baring did not trust alone to intuition in building up his studies of Russia. Will the reader run an eye over the complete tale of them between the years 1905 and '14? The result is now tamed into manageable proportions, but just for fun I will give the list:

With the Russians in Manchuria (published 1905).

A Year in Russia (1907).

Russian Essays and Stories (1908).

Landmarks in Russian Literature (1910) (out of print).

The Russian People (1911).

What I Saw in Russia (1913).

The Mainspring of Russia (1914) (out of print).

An Outline of Russian Literature (1914),

and finally—

The Oxford Book of Russian Verse (1924),

chosen by Maurice Baring.

Yet a man might double this output in vain unless he possessed what Mrs. Cornish called “a little silver filter in his brain which lets nothing but the truth pass.” It is thanks to the filter that his handling of the earthly scene is so convincing; “This is not mere literature,” you say to yourself, “it is exactly what happened—the very white of truth,” as Keats puts it.” What he had in mind when he wrote those words I don’t know, but they perfectly describe the outcome of Baring’s methods. And as some day Russia will, I suppose, be as dominating a factor on this globe as America, it seems worth while having a trustworthy diagnosis of her soul.

I often think of something the great German sculptor Hildebrand said when I repeated to him a remark of Rodin’s about a certain portrait-bust of his. Having ventured to comment, as amateurs will, in the style of: “Isn’t the nose rather short?” or “Hasn’t she a lower forehead?” Rodin replied that an artist is justified in departing from exact truth if thereby the mystery of Nature can be transcended. “I cannot believe,” commented Hildebrand, whose spiritual father was the Renaissance, “that

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anything can transcend the mystery of truth *if you give it a chance.*"

Take a battlefield; nine out of ten people fall back unconsciously on all the descriptions of battlefields they have ever read. Baring picks out one thing that fired his imagination and makes you see what he saw on that very spot. . . . And in his novels the human heart is passed through the filter in the same way; but it is not yet time to talk about that.

In the course of his Russian narrative some current theories are upset. It is news that the Trans-Baikal Cossacks are the most good-natured, easy-going of men, and that on the whole they rather remind one of the Irish; but we can easily believe that if asked whether a river is fordable the Cossack goes straight in to see, taking the risk of drowning, and never is drowned. And he delighted in two Cossack proverbs: "The Cossack's brother is death," and "The Cossack will starve, but his horse will have eaten its fill"; which calls to mind an Arab story quoted elsewhere in which the horse is supposed to say to his master: "Ride me like an enemy; feed me like a friend."

As for Cossack gentleness and long-sufferingness, Baring declares he has often seen the Chinese refuse them fuel and bread when they were cold and hungry; and instead of taking to abuse and threats, the Cossacks would accept the situation as a sort of "bad luck" till Baring longed to incite them to take what they wanted. In fact, reluctantly qualifying his great admiration for the Chinese, he admits that when it comes to personal contact about things like food, lodging, and fuel, their relentless graspingness and greed were "enough to drive you mad." And the worst of it was that they always got the better of you unless you used physical force, which competent authorities said was the greatest mistake.

Nevertheless, Baring sometimes went beyond the limits of peaceful persuasion. "At dawn" (he writes) "I was awakened by the noise of guns which seemed to be very near. I made ready to ride out immediately, but my servant brought me the news that my pony had been stolen during the night. The house was infested by Chinese boys and *mafoos* (grooms), who were

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Christians and spoke French, two bad signs. I asked what steps had been taken to recover the pony. My servant said he had been to the police who had inscribed in a book the names, ancestors, domicile and religion of the horse and its owner, and that the necessary proceedings would be taken in due course. As this process seemed likely to involve delay I adopted another. I took every Chinese in the house by the pigtail and said I would thrash them one after the other until the pony was brought back. I also gave a small coin to one of the *mafoos*—a certain Vassili who was the greatest scoundrel of the lot.”

“This sounds brutal, but it was the only way to get my pony back; and had I not done so I should have been taken prisoner by the Japanese and sent home. In half an hour’s time I was informed that the pony had returned of its own accord. It walked in at the gate with its headstall in perfect order, showing that it had not broken loose. I started at once in the direction of the firing, but unfortunately this delay caused me to miss the first engagement.”

Then I delight in side-issues described in this volume that only one with intimate knowledge of the language could pick up. For instance, he recounts a quarrel between two soldiers who were hurling furniture into a van. “They were calling each other names which not only would be quite unprintable, but seemed to be the last word of all abusive language. Since, however, the terms employed formed part and parcel of the everyday language of those men, all their sting had gone. The coins were so debased by constant circulation that their intrinsic value had been long ago lost sight of.”

“The process went on good-naturedly enough until one of the men called the other a sheep. This seemed to me to be the first harmless word which had been bandied during the conversation. The effect produced was tremendous. The man who was called a sheep threw down the plank he was handling, and declared to the world at large that that was more than human nature could bear, that he refused to work with a man who called him a sheep, and that a man who called another a sheep

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without reason or justification was fit to be killed. . . .”

Eventually two officers arrived and told the men to go on with their work. But when Baring’s train started the quarrel was still raging, and the last words he heard were “Sheep! Sheep! He called me a sheep!”

At the end of this volume there is an account of a journey down the Volga beginning with Baring’s dealings with a small boy of domineering character who apparently had no need of sleep and went from passenger to passenger waking them up and telling them where they would have to change; asking if they would like the window open; twice picking up Baring’s candlestick (a bottle) which he had placed on the floor for safety while he slept, and waking him to inform him he had done so; till at last Baring told him that if he woke him again he would throw him out of the window.

And there is the sort of thing that specially delights me—a report of an endless discussion between the members of a family who had annexed his copy of “Elizabeth’s” charming book *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr. Anstruther* on the steamer, and talked of nothing else during the whole journey. Then we have the fair at Nizhni-Novgorod and his flyman’s method of taking him to “the best hotel”; the distress of a bearded Cossack over Baring’s baldness, his enquiry as to whether it was caused by illness or nature, and his remark that as it was nature nothing could be done. “It is God’s business,” he said, turned over, and went to sleep.

And so you read on—float on, I should say; “and the night with its web of stars, and the dark waters, and the thin line of the far-off banks, make one lose all sense of reality. One has reached another world, the nether world perhaps; one breathes

“The scent of alien meadows far away”

and one feels as if one were sailing down the river of oblivion to the harbours of Proserpine.”

He afterwards ascertained that the wonderful sweetness came from new-mown hay which lay in great masses over the steppes,

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embalming the midnight air and turning the world into Paradise.

When you go travelling with Baring, absurd and exquisite scenes jostle each other as they do in real life; and for my part, if we were both younger, I should be content to go twice round the world with that traveller—(as the reader will do once, at all events, in the course of a few pages).

* * * * *

In the first section of this book I have stolen a few Russian scenes from *The Puppet Show*, and when we arrive at the three volumes of short stories there will be more sidelights on Russia. So I won't dwell longer here on this particular book, but I should like to point out that through all these studies Baring specially emphasises the child-like strain in this people.

Yet sometimes it takes a strange turn. Three or four years ago I read—I think it was in *Blackwood*—an Englishman's description of a walking tour in the heart of Russia, and of the wonderful hospitality and human kindness shown him by the peasants. Then suddenly a violent electric shock is administered. Drinking tea one day in a cottage, he gazed at the burned-out shell of the Big House, and the peasants described how the eldest son of the family rushed from one side to the other of the blazing top storey, yelling for help now at this window, now at that, till suddenly the floor gave way and he disappeared. While telling this story his hosts roared with laughter. Deeply shocked, the Englishman said: “They were bad, cruel landlords, I suppose?” The peasants stared, and one of them said: “*Bad, cruel landlords?* Why, they were our father and our mother!”

I remember asking Mr. Baring if this story, which I must confess read convincingly, could possibly be true. He said “Certainly” and pointed out that such would be the reaction of any child to such a spectacle till civilisation has taken root on the scene, bringing with it reflection, the putting together of two and two, and all sorts of cross-currents of emotion.

To me the anecdote is perfectly compatible with what I think are the most significant passages in the book. Summing up his

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reasons for succumbing to what he calls the fascination of Russia, he writes:

"During my stays in Russia I saw some of the worst as well as some of the best aspects of the country and its people. The net result was the sense of an overpowering charm in the country, an indescribable fascination in the people. . . . The qualities that did exist, and whose benefit I experienced, seemed to me the most precious of all qualities; the virtues the most important of all virtues; the glimpses of beauty the rarest in kind; the songs and the music the most haunting and most heart-searching; the poetry nearest to nature and man; the human charity nearest to God."

It is interesting to find in a letter from Vernon Lee (see p. 207) that she, who I believe had never lived in Russia, seems to have come to a similar conclusion from studying Russian literature—the conclusion that they were "bringing some new element of goodness and depth, left out of our Franco-Roman-Germanic Tripos."

To conclude Baring's paen: "The secret of the whole matter," he says, "is, perhaps, that the Russian soul is filled with a human Christian charity which is warmer in kind and intenser in degree, *and expressed with a greater simplicity and sincerity than is to be met with in any other people*" (the italics are mine). "It was the existence of this quality which gave charm to Russian life, however squalid the circumstance might be, poignancy to its music, sincerity and simplicity to its religion, manners, intercourse, music, singing, verse, art, acting;—in a word to its art, its life, and its faith."

If this seems high praise, it is borne out by the experiences recounted in these Russian books of Baring's. The late Prince Edmond de Polignac, wittiest of men, used to say pessimism was "*le don de voir toutes choses telles qu'elles sont*," but I think that could also be said of optimism! Mercifully nature has provided us with a large assortment of tinted glasses, and myself I think well of the colour of Baring's—particularly when he perceives through them the sincerity and simplicity of spirit he so often

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speaks of, and which, judging by what I have seen of Russians, seems to be the hall-mark of the race.

Let me cite as instance Count and Countess Benckendorff. Just as, according to Baring, the best style is where there is no style—“or rather where we no longer notice the style, so appropriate, so inevitable, so easy is the thing done, said, or sung made to appear,” he writes, “so did Count Benckendorff’s beautiful manners and the perfection of his courtesy come from absence of style, of anything that made you think of diplomacy. His distinction, one felt, was based on native integrity; a fundamental horror of anything common, mean, or unkind; the incapacity of striking a wrong note in word or deed; the impossibility of hurting anyone’s feelings.” Of course these are characteristics all the world over of one who is *grand seigneur* to the core. But again and again in conversations which Baring reports do you come across traits like these among the peasants.

As for Countess Benckendorff, her directness, her culture, her enjoyment of life, the utter spontaneity and naturalness of her outlook, I imagine she must have been a typical Russian gentlewoman. It was of her that Henry Brewster wrote: “When one talks with her it is always fresh molten bronze, and not old putty accustomed to take any shape or none.” Having said which the reader will appreciate a priceless remark of that hostess I spoke of on the threshold of this book . . . the one who had a handful of people at her command whose opinions she quoted as being those of “*the real people*”—authorities whose verdict on all subjects it was blasphemy to question. Over many of this lady’s sayings I shall gloat to the end of my days, but none is more characteristic than her remark on Countess Benckendorff: “What a delightful woman!—so clever and so cultivated! . . . *but of course not an Ambassadress!*”

This thirty-year-old remark jumped back into my head when I read in one of Baring’s books how a travelling companion of his on board ship, alluding to the flourishes and frills of the man in possession of the Lounge piano, said he would enjoy music “if all the damned Hell were knocked out of it.” Countess

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Benckendorff being a Russian *grande dame*, there was no "damned Hell" in her conception of an Ambassadress, though that is just the part certain members of the public particularly count on, whether in the pianistic or the diplomatic world! Anyhow, as simplicity and sincerity are good foundations to build on, one may look with confidence to the future of a race in whose make-up these appear to be predominating elements.

XIV

"OUTLINES OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE"—THE POETS

LIKE *The Mainsprings of Russia*, Baring's first book on Russian Literature (*Landmarks in Russian Literature*, 1910, translated into Russian in 1913) is out of print. But I question if anything can be better than his *Outlines of Russian Literature* published in 1914, which, like his contribution to Benn's sixpenny library on the literature of France, exhibits a remarkable gift for condensation.

Early in the *Outlines* he tells us that the peculiar and unique message Russia had to deliver would not be sensibly affected by the disappearance of everything written before the beginning of the nineteenth century, except *The Raid of Prince Igor*—an epic of the twelfth century, written when Kief was the centre of a rich civilisation, and which may be called a sort of Russian *Chanson de Roland*. When, in 1800, this ancient poem was dragged from beneath the ruins that the Tartar invasion of the thirteenth century had left behind it—a tragedy from which the country had never recovered—it seems to have created the sort of sensation caused in Scotland by the appearance of the *Songs of Ossian*. But Baring says it was not open to Dr. Johnson's objection, "Show me the originals!", inasmuch as the fourteenth-century transcript of the original was inspected by the pundits and pronounced unmistakably genuine. Unfortunately, this transcript was burnt in the fire of Moscow, but in 1864 another copy of it was found among the papers of Catherine I.

It has been translated into English, French, and German, and here is the charming quotation Baring gives us from the Lament of the wife of Igor:

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"... I will fly
Like the cuckoo down the Don,
I will wet my beaver sleeve
In the river Kayala;
I will wash the bleeding wounds of the Prince,
The wounds of his strong body."

* * * * *

"O Wind, little wind,
Why, Sir, why do you blow so fiercely?
Why, on your light wings
Do you blow the arrows of the robbers
Against my husband's warriors?
Is it not enough for you
To blow high beneath the clouds,
To rock the ships on the blue sea?
Why, Sir, have you scattered my joy
On the grassy plain?"

Probably the whole epic is not on this level; and without undue cynicism one can but recall the dreary wastes that have to be traversed in works of this kind. But a point in favour of the *Raid of Prince Igor* is that in it nature plays an active part; the grasses bend with pity and the trees are bowed to the earth with grief. When Igor escapes he talks with the river Don as he fords it much as certain Homeric heroes discourse with Scamander, and the woodpeckers guide him by their tapping.

In order to read this epic one would probably have to spend days upon days in the British Museum—but we can reflect at home on the fact that Oxford was a centre of civilisation long before the University was founded in orthodox fashion by Cardinal Wolsey, and contrast our subsequent cultural fortunes with those of an older and apparently more magnificent civilisation in the East. While we in England were passing through the Elizabethan, the Jacobean, and the Georgian epochs, while in France the Renaissance, the Grand Siècle, and the philosophic era of the eighteenth century were succeeding each other, Russia was lying devastated and stagnant, unable to lift her head until, five hundred

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years later, the genius of Peter the Great shook, spurred and thrashed her into life.

Then things began to move. In 1755 the Empress Elizabeth founded the University of Moscow and the great Catherine carried on the work. Finally the whirlwind passage of Napoleon through Europe acted on Russia exactly as it did on Germany, and the time was now ripe for the great man, after whose advent one may begin, according to Baring, to talk of Russian Literature.

Yet some of the lesser poets who preceded Pushkin—the great man in question—must, according to the *Outlines*, be arresting figures; *Karamsin*, who revealed to Russia the undreamed-of riches of her language, and *Krylov*, the fabulist, whose association with animals seems to have had the purging, simplifying effect it had on La Fontaine (or was it a case of like seeking like, both poets turning to the relative uncomplicatedness of the beasts of the field?), with the result that both became popular instantly. Then there was *Ryleef*, who was hanged for taking part in a military rising and whose stanzas on the vision of enslaved Russia are said to have a fire and tense strength which recall Emily Brontë.

But of all this group—forerunners of Pushkin, one may call them—the one that seems the most interesting is *Griboyedov* (1795-1829), author of a comedy *Gore of Uma* ("The Misfortune of being Clever"), which is said to be of the quality of Beaumarchais' *Figaro* or Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. According to Pushkin (and also to Baring), every scene is dramatically perfect in itself, but there is no connecting link between them; as you will find out (says Pushkin) if you try to decide which of the many characters are supposed to be victims of inconvenient cleverness; or, says Baring—and it amounts to the same thing—if you try to group these brilliant episodes round a central idea.

I gather this is (or was then) a common Russian failing; it is as though these poets found the creation of isolated pictures more amusing, and perhaps easier, than building to a fixed plan. Yet the naturalness of the characters and dialogue, the comedy of the scenes which are supposed to represent Moscow society,

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are such, that three-quarters of the play has passed into the Russian language. The style, we are told, is forcible, concise, and bitingly sarcastic; neat and dry as W. S. Gilbert, elegant as La Fontaine, clean as the thrust of a sword. And the crowning merit of this "immortal satire" is its originality.

Why is it impossible to get hold of a translation of this comedy of Griboyedov's with such an enchanting title—a work which, as product of Russian life and genius, is as yet without a rival; which is more alive in Russia than our Restoration Comedies are here, and more frequently played than Sheridan is in England? What makes it still stranger is that, as described in the *Outlines*, it should appeal to us as strongly as Chekhov.

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And now, stepping over these and one or two other lesser lights, we draw a breath of relief as we arrive at *Pushkin*. Of him at least we have heard, are vaguely aware that he was a great poet and the first universally noticeable growth in that short but brilliant flowering of Russian literature, in which, possibly, Chekhov and Gorky represent the last roses of summer. But of his work we know as little as that of others who flourished at the same time, like *Lermontov* and *Koltsov* (the Russian Burns), or of *The Pléiade* that followed him, whom, given our helpless ignorance, it seems useless even to name! And even of Pushkin we should know less than we do, were it not that, draped in the divine music of Moussorgsky, his great historical epic, *Boris Goudenov*, has walked round the world.

Pushkin, born in 1799, was of ancient lineage, and like many Russian writers began as a wild, ambitious worldling with no object in life save passion and pleasure. But with his thirtieth year a new leaf was turned over, and a religious vein, which had always been there, but overgrown with rank weeds, came into its own. His end was that of one reconciled with God and man, but the circumstances that led to his death do not suggest the saint. Believing that a guardsman had been flirting with his wife, he fought a duel and was mortally wounded. Such was

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his frenzy, that after lying unconscious in the snow, no sooner had he regained his senses than he insisted on going on with the duel, and gave a great cry of joy when he saw that he had slightly wounded his adversary. Not till he reached home did his anger leave him: he received the last sacraments and desired that none should avenge him, dying at the age of thirty-seven.

We are told that with the growing seriousness of his turn of thought his gift became purer and stronger, but the inferior work of his youth, with its dazzling colours, and sensuous, sometimes libidinous images, was more to the taste of a public not yet ripe for the simpler and more majestic harmonies of his later poetry.

With the terrible subject-matter of *Boris Goudenov* we are all acquainted, so I should like to give some other specimen of the key in which the work of this poet, who ranks in Russia as a "douce man," was pitched.

The story of *The Gypsy*, which was the most popular poem he ever wrote, and the strange blessing bestowed on the gypsy's murderer at the end by her father, is of a violence that strikes the average Western mind as extraordinarily un-Western. Aleko, a disgruntled worldling, takes refuge with the gypsies, and marries the girl Zemfira. But after a time she tires of him, and takes one of her own people as lover. Aleko surprises them together and kills both.

Now I fancy that less than a century ago, though an English Aleko, if caught, would have been hanged, many fathers of peccant young ladies would have secretly sympathised with him. I remember that exactly fifty years ago, asked in fun by his favourite daughter what he would do if she took a lover and ran away from her husband (of whom, as it happened, she was very fond), her father nearly shattered a stout mahogany table with his fist as he bellowed: "I'd curse ye!"

But Zemfira's father though a gypsy was a *Russian* gypsy and his reaction was as follows. After informing Aleko that his own wife had left him, and that far from attempting any vengeance

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he had brought up her child (whose father, one presumes, was the lover), this is what he said to his son-in-law:

"Leave us, proud man. We are a wild people, we have no laws, we torture not neither do we punish; we have no use for blood or groans. We will not live with a man of blood. Thou wast not made for the wild life; for thyself alone thou claimest licence. We are shy and good-natured; thou art evil-minded and presumptuous. *Farewell, and peace be with thee!*"

I wonder if anything could make one feel the distance between Russia and England more startlingly than this enchanting story of less than one hundred and fifty years ago? The culminating blessing pronounced by the father takes one's breath away.

Neither I nor the majority of my readers can hope to get into touch with Pushkin, judging by the fate of Selma Lagerlöf, whose work, if available at all, has never been done into readable English. If I revelled in the novels of this great writer thirty years ago, it was thanks to living in Germany. Let anyone read Baring on Pushkin and judge of what we are deprived by our insular incuriosity—what richness, what tenderness (notwithstanding his fierceness), what a vast reach!

For years Russian criticism seems to have treated him with either neglect or injustice; but in 1881, when Dostoyevsky unveiled his memorial at Moscow, the homage he paid to the dead poet roused the feeling of the whole of Russia. And Baring winds up his appreciation in *Outlines* by words which I hope echo in Pushkin's ears wherever he may be now: "His work is beyond the reach of critics, whether favourable or unfavourable, for it lives in the hearts of his countrymen, and chiefly on the lips of the young."

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Before leaving the poets and going on to the prose writers—and here we shall have our feet on *terra cognita*—I should like to draw attention to Baring's deeply interesting Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Russian Verse* (1923)—(the only part of the book, alas!, that is in English)—concerning which that



Sosnofka, Count Benckendorff's Home in Russia.

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severe, that most critical of critics, Prince Mirsky, has declared that in it the writer has said the last word on Russian poetry.

I confess that for that reason the sight of that little dark blue volume angers me. It is fourteen years since it appeared, and by now the world has surely acquired faith in Baring as a judge of poetry; it did not need a book like *Have You Anything to Declare?* to achieve that much! Is it not time that this Russian Anthology should be translated?

When we note what he says about Pushkin, that he constantly reminds one of Greek Art, that certain lines of his could only have been written in either Russian or Greek, our souls burn within us. Then we read his *prose* translation of such lines: "I loved you, and it may be that the love within my soul has not yet altogether died away; howbeit it will not trouble you any more, I do not wish to sadden you in any way. I loved you in silence and without hope, worn out now with jealousy, now with shamefacedness. I loved you as truly and tenderly as God grant you may be loved by some other one!" I ask you, reader, whether it is not incomprehensible that no publisher has felt himself called upon to hand on such riches to his countrymen in coin they can use?

Our exclusion comes home to us with special bitterness when we read the last few lines of Baring's "Introduction." Speaking of characteristics that Greek and Russian poetry have in common, he finds in both "the same unique quality of naturalness and sincerity" (here once more we are face to face with these specifically Russian traits!), "the same love of realism"—that is to say of reality—"the same absence of unnecessary ornament." But he points out that in the subject-matter of Russian poetry are qualities unlike anything that is to be found in Greek literature; which in fact were unknown to the ancients, and only came to the world with Christianity. And underlining the fact that Russian poetry expresses the Russian soul, he adds: "The method of expression may be Greek, but the quality expressed is Russian, and widely different from anything Greek in its essentials. What

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it expresses is a spiritual flame, a fraternal sympathy, a great-hearted wisdom—pity, love, an all-embracing charity;

Infinite passion and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn."

No! I cannot think that publishers will for ever grudge us a seat at the feast provided by these Russian poets!

XV

"OUTLINES OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE"; THE PROSE WRITERS

ONE is conscious of a slight sense of exhilaration in approaching the Russian novelists, between whom and us no such gulf yawns as between us and the poets, for at least some of their books have been translated into every European language.

It is true that, according to Baring and many other Russian scholars, these translations give but a faint idea of the originals; that he who reads, say, *Anna Karenina*, in Russian, and then takes up a translation murmurs to himself, "But this is another book!" They allow that Tolstoi translates better than the others, because a large part of his work concerns Russian society, where French was spoken habitually, but as for westernising writers like Gogol and Turgenev . . . impossible!

For my part I don't care who says this. Thanks to the comprehensive art, the truthfulness of presentment, and the passion for reality of these great writers, I believe we can have as firm a hold of their work as is necessary; as firm probably as they have of Shakespeare and Dickens, or of Jerome K. Jerome, who appears to be more read in the Russian army than any other English author! (Some thirty years ago *Paradise Lost* ran him very close, but Soviet rule may have affected this preference.)

Nothing gave me greater confidence in this optimistic view than Baring's story of the two soldiers who hurled unprintable insults at each other without impairing the friendliness of their relations, till one called the other a sheep. Baring always makes you believe that what he says happened really did happen, but no one who has read Gogol will have difficulty in believing the sheep anecdote because exactly the same thing occurs in *The Quarrel of the Two Ivans*—a story of two men who had been

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bosom friends till, years and years ago, they had quarrelled about nothing. And when, as elderly men, they were on the point of making it up, the incautious mention by one of them of the word "goose," which had originally brought about the quarrel, caused it to blaze up once more, and this time irrevocably!

Studying Baring's *Outlines of Russian Literature* it occurred to me that it would be interesting to make two lists; one of Russian writers who have died violent deaths; the other of those who started life wild as hawks, but whose liberal or revolutionary ideas were gradually tamed by life into orthodoxy, and whose only thought towards the end was religion. We foreigners are apt to chafe at what we consider Tolstoi's inexplicable fall from literary grace, but Baring assures us it is a common Russian characteristic for men midway in a successful career to turn aside and seek consolation in the things that are not of this world—indeed, there is a word for these men, *Bogoiskateli*, Seekers after God; and if the most famous instance is Tolstoi, Gogol's story is much on the same lines.

Born in 1809 in Cossack-land, Gogol obtained a place in a Government office, tried to go on the stage, failed, became an unsuccessful professor of history, and finally turned to literature, in which world he made friends with Pushkin and quickly blossomed into a successful writer. But a dream combined with other circumstances to drive his thoughts inward, he became an ascetic and a recluse, and in the end, greatly to the disgust of Western enthusiasts and Liberals everywhere, he preached submission to the Government, both spiritual and temporal.

A satirist who ruthlessly unveils and castigates human folly, there is none of Dean Swift's bitterness about Gogol. His irony is toned down with "large charity"—a blend Baring claims as specifically Russian. And judging by Pushkin's story about the father of Zemfira; remembering too the magnanimity of Pushkin himself, who when dying forbade his family to avenge him, one is ready to believe that "large charity" is a Russian trait. "Gogol sees" (writes Baring) "what is mean and common clearer than

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anyone, but does not infer from it that life, or mankind, or the world, is common and mean. On the contrary. He puts Chichikov, the hero of his chief novel *Dead Souls*, no lower morally than he would put Napoleon, Harpagon, and Don Juan—all of them victims of a ruling passion, and all of them great by reason of it; Chichikov being great in rascality, Harpagon in avarice, and Don Juan in profligacy."

This most original of writers is described as a romantic with a touch of the eerie, a delight in the supernatural, and an impish fancy that reminds one of his German contemporary E. T. A. Hoffmann or of Robert Stevenson. But personally Gogol reminds me, above all, of Dickens. English sense of humour would surely be tickled by many of the stories in the volume entitled *Taras Bulba*—(*The Two Ivans* is one of them)—and the pathos of others would certainly move English hearts to sympathy, which cannot be said of all foreign-grown tears. But in *Taras Bulba* itself—the magnificent *novvelle* from which the collection takes its name—there is nothing of Dickens. It is as fiercely Cossack as many of Selma Lagerlöf's stories are obviously fragments of Scandinavian sagas. Let readers judge for themselves; the book exists in admirable English translation.

Whether Gogol's greatest work *Dead Souls* has been translated into English I do not know, but it certainly exists in French, for I read it in French. Of this work, the fantastic plot of which he tells, Baring says: "Like *Don Quixote* it makes boys laugh, young men think, and old men weep." If not a boy when first I read it, at all events I was a girl, and remember thinking that no one makes you laugh with that particular sort of laughter except Dickens.

Much space has been given here to Gogol, partly because of a personal predilection, but still more in order to connect him with a plea uttered on an earlier page. If the Russian Anthology cries for translation mainly because Russian Poetry is said to express the Russian soul, one feels instinctively that this is equally true of Gogol. Consequently, as Baring says: "Whoever gives England a really fine translation of Gogol's work will do his

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country a service." And in turning over the pages to make sure that these words are correctly quoted, what do I find to my delight?—that Mérimée places Gogol among the "*best English humorists!*"

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Having grumbled at the lack of translating enterprise in England, it is a pleasure to thank Messrs. Arnold for giving us Mr. J. D. Duff's splendid translation of two very splendid books, *A Russian Schoolboy* and *A Russian Gentleman* by Serge Aksakov, both taken, I gather, from his *Family Chronicle* published in 1856. These two volumes appeared in 1917, apparently as result of the mention of this writer in *Outlines*. "The story," says Baring, "is as vivid and interesting as that of any novel—as those of the Russian novelists of genius—and it has the additional value of being true. . . . Once you have begun these books it is impossible to put them down, and I have heard of children who read them like fairy tales." This panegyric, of which I have given only half a dozen lines, was written twenty-five years ago; let anyone who has not read the books ask for them—specially *A Russian Gentleman*—at their library, and see whether what Baring says about them is exaggerated; and to-day one can add that they are the parents of many charming English memoirs which have appeared of late years. This proves that he who puts a fine translation of a fine author within reach of his countrymen is indeed a public benefactor. Aksakov and Turgenev taught some of us to write simply and naturally—qualities that sit very well on our race.

Re-reading *Outlines*, which I consider one of Baring's masterpieces, I am conscious of two particular sources of enjoyment; one is, that even when the great writers we are now coming to are in question, you so often find your attention drawn to points that escape the ordinary reader's attention, and pull you up as a touch of the curb pulls up a horse; the other is that as you go along you sometimes pick up incidentally what this least self-assertive of writers thinks about our own people.

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For instance there is a passage in which he says we cannot expect the younger generation of Russians to get wildly excited about Turgenev's ideas, characters, and problems, for they belong to an epoch that is dead. Still he can't help thinking that even the most advanced of symbolists would not have been sorry had he by chance written *Bezbin Meadow* and the *Poems in Prose* (works of Turgenev's I do not know). In the same way he fancies that if one of the most modern of our own poets had happened by accident to have written *The Revenge* or *Tears, idle Tears* he would not have put the manuscripts into the fire!

Again, he remarks that Turgenev and Tennyson have something in common; neither has any striking message to deliver; both seem to halt, except on rare occasions, on the threshold of passion; both have a rare stamp of nobility, and in both is an element of banality. And finally, Baring, who, as I said before, is more musical than he has any idea of, declares that if Pushkin is Mozart among Russian writers, Turgenev is Schumann; not one of the very greatest of all, but still a poet full of inspired feeling and a great, a classic artist—the prose Virgil of Russian literature.

I am not closely enough acquainted with these authors to examine a parallel which I fancy is correct more closely. But as I am writing, or trying to write, about Baring, these are the sort of passages I like to dig out of *Outlines* and dangle before the eyes of my readers.

Here is another. He says that the Crimean War and the reforms which followed “stabbed the Russian soul into life, relieved it of its gag, and gave to the world three of its greatest novelists—Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.” Similarly, as historians of to-day pour scorn on the policy that brought about that war, we English can take comfort in thinking that it gave us “The Charge of the Light Brigade” and Florence Nightingale! In the ten or fifteen pages that lie between Turgenev and the other two, authors are mentioned of whom we have never heard; but Baring's description and analysis of their work arrest us because he has the knack of drawing aside the language-curtain and

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giving us peeps of Russian types that are duplicated all the world over. Reading about Vladimir A, and Liza B, you say to yourself: "How exactly like old Colonel O'Rourke Vladimir is! And as for Liza, she's not *like*—she *is* Louise!" (an old French maid one remembers).

The fascination of *Outlines* is that again and again you are handed a magic lens through which you see as deeply into the hearts of the insects that move across the paper for your benefit as does Baring who set them moving. For instance, there is a certain *Michael Saltykov* (the name strikes one as appropriate)—a satirist of diabolical malice, with an unequalled eye for the ironical, the criminal, the topsy-turvy, and the true. Observant as Gogol but bitter as Swift, Saltykov seems to have written volume upon volume, many of the pages of which are almost unintelligible owing to the sediment of hatred and venom that lies at the bottom of his ink-pot. In his works are crowded together all the unpleasant characters set in all the unpleasant circumstances the author can think of: fraudulent collectors of dues; hideous scenes from prison life; the idiotic formalism of officialdom; the incurable vices of the Russian political system; ideal settlements like the City of Glupov (Fool City) where the people are so stupid that they are not content till they have found someone to rule them who is stupider than themselves; all this packed tightly in thousands upon thousands of pages in which spite, scorn, and malice are varied—but only occasionally—with high strokes of tragic irony and pity; and I suppose the remark that all great satire rests upon a substratum of compassion is true. Meanwhile, though the ordinary reader does not yearn for a translation of Saltykov, you cannot lift your eyes from Baring's account of this unpleasant author. And remembering the apathy to reform manifested when the second Duma was dissolved, one asks oneself if anything but the terrible lever of which all the rest of Europe stands now in such dread could have lifted this people out of the Slough of Despond.

The Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky chapter of *Outlines* begins with

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a statement we all subscribe to: that if Russia has not given the world a universal poet—a Shakespeare, a Dante, a Goethe or a Molière—she has produced two prose writers whose work has become a part of the inheritance of all nations.

To begin with Tolstoy, I suppose it rather troubles us English, that in the midst of a great and glorious artistic career he abjured literature and art, denounced worldly possessions, and declared that the sole road to salvation was working like a peasant, yet none the less went on writing, and lived as before with his family in his own house. Baring maintains there is no inconsistency in this curious conduct, that Tolstoy had been a "Seeker after God" all his life, and that we cannot blame him, if, owing to family ties, he was unable to push his premises to their logical conclusion till just before his death. Enough for us that he did so at the last, and was on his way to a monastery when he died!

We agree that there is something solemn and great about his having met with Death at a small railway station; also, as Napoleon said about St. Helena: "it rounds off the legend." All the same, even if we hadn't read some rather querulous memoirs by various members of his family, we should guess that he must have been an uncomfortable human being to live with, and a saint with a big flaw in him somewhere. *Levin* in *Anna Karenina* is obviously a self-portrait, and we know that a peasant persuaded Levin that the only solution of the problem of life is to live for your soul. And certainly Tolstoy did turn his back on materialism and sought for truth in the Church. Also, as the Church failed to satisfy him, he rejected its dogma and its ritual and turned to the Gospels. *But* . . . instead of accepting the New Testament he re-wrote it (rather like present-day Hitler bishops). And one may be certain that had he lived long enough to enter that monastery, the monks would have had a bad time of it. For such was his arrogance that he could admire nothing—not even his own masterpieces which he considered as worthless as those of Shakespeare and Beethoven.

But there is a fact bearing on his personality which should not be ignored. Tolstoy not only railed at the Church, but in

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an epoch of strong reaction he fearlessly attacked all constituted authority, both spiritual and temporal. For far less than this Russian thinkers and writers of high position had been imprisoned and exiled, but he took the risk; and such was Tolstoy's prestige, that official Russia raised not a finger. And this is perhaps the first great victory of the liberty of individual thought over official tyranny in that country.

Baring believes that what the world will remember is not his heretical angle to religion, art, food, and everything else, but his "faithful practice," which was orthodox in its obedience to the highest canons—orthodox as were Homer and Shakespeare regarding their own canons. Therefore, argues Baring, Tolstoy is one of the greatest earthly examples of *the normal and the sane*.

This theory, which at first sounds startling, is none the less incontestable. And supposing his "faithful practice" had called upon him one day, in a fury of moral and religious fervour, to make a Lady-Burton-holocaust of his manuscripts, even so no one would have been a penny the worse, for the works had been safely published long ago!

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Passing to Dostoyevsky one asks oneself if there can ever have been a greater contrast, whether as to circumstances or mentality, than Russia's two great prose writers; one born in the lap of luxury, the other in direst poverty; Tolstoy theorising on the distribution of food while Dostoyevsky was starving. The one wrote in affluence and leisure, and recast most of his books; the other worked like a literary hack for his daily bread, ever pressed for time, ever in crying need of money.

The divergence between the nature and outlook of the two men is still more remarkable. Dostoyevsky, the practising believer, a vehement champion of orthodoxy who died fortified by the sacraments of the Church, was the largest-minded man who ever lived; whereas Tolstoy, with his broad unreligious opinions, and his detestation of all things mystical and spiritual, was a narrow-minded tyrant to the core. Finally, Tolstoy was

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incapable of humility and self-abasement, whereas, coupled with resignation, these are the mainsprings of Dostoyevsky's being.

One rather suspects that of the two great men, it is Dostoyevsky, the epileptic, the painter of the abnormal, of criminals and madmen, of degenerates and mystics (who nevertheless in *The Devils* foresaw Lenin and the exact course the Revolution would take), that Baring prefers, even as writer. And I think the clue for this preference can be found in the following passage:

"Dostoyevsky is great because of the divine message he gives; not didactically, not by sermons, but by the goodness that emanates like a precious balm from the characters he creates; because, more than any other books in the world, his books reflect not only the teaching and the charity, but the accent and the divine aura of love that are in the Gospels. 'Be cheerful as children and as the birds' was Father Losima's advice to Alyoska, and that is the gist of Dostoyevsky's message to mankind. 'Life,' he also says to Alyoska, 'will bring you many misfortunes, but you will be happy on account of them, and you will bless life, and cause others to bless it.' Here we have the whole secret of Dostoyevsky's greatness. He blessed life and he caused others to bless it."

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In the concluding chapter of *Outlines* it is remarked that with the death of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky, the great epoch of Russian literature came to an end, and that a period of literary as well as of political stagnation set in which lasted till the Russo-Japanese War (1904). Baring's feeling is that the literary soil of Russia needed a rest, and that, as some Russian had said, at that time the country was playing herself to death at *vindt* (an older form of *bridge*) which is exactly the sensation Chekhov's plays give us. He and Gorky are shortly mentioned in *Outlines*, but the references to these and one or two contemporary writers of theirs are rather in the style of one who considers the time has not yet come for a comprehensive consideration of their work. Also one must remember that *Outlines* was barely finished when the Great War broke out.

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I will only quote here the paragraph which concludes this remarkable summary of Russian Literature. "Two things must strike us; firstly the comparative shortness of its life . . . secondly, that in spite of its being the youngest of all literatures, it seems to be spiritually the oldest. In some respects it seems to have become over-ripe before it reached maturity. But herein, perhaps, lies the secret of its greatness, and this may be the value of its contribution to the soul of mankind. It is:

'Old in grief, and very wise in tears':

and its chief gift to mankind is an expression of that grief and wisdom, made with a naturalness and sincerity that are matchless, and a love of reality which is unique. For all Russian literature, whether in prose or verse, is rooted in reality; its grief and wisdom come from a heart large enough to embrace the world and drown all sorrows therein with the immensity of its sympathy, its fraternity, its pity, its charity, and its love."

XVI

BARING THE HUMORIST: "UNRELIABLE HISTORY"

IF a mysterious voice were to proclaim that all Baring's books save one are to be swept off the face of the earth, the solitary survivor to be chosen by ballot, I suspect my choice would be *Unreliable History*—a volume comprising three separate books, *Diminutive Dramas*, *Dead Letters*, and *Lost Diaries*, the material of which originally appeared in the *Morning Post* and *The Eye Witness* respectively.

These three books belong together as naturally as any of the triplets whose features so often adorn the front pages of newspapers. As Mr. Belloc wrote in a Preface designed for the new issue but which unfortunately missed the connection, united they have become an "opus magnus et per durable," and will achieve "what they do not so much deserve as obtain of right."

He points out that there is a subtle difference between the dramas, the letters, and the diaries; that they form not a sequence but a ring. And he adds what I think is the truest and weightiest word that can be said about this trilogy—that it is the essence of what is civilised, and the only thing in modern English letters which is wholly European and classic.

Two things—no, three—jump to the eye in *Unreliable History*. Firstly, a knowledge of the classics so lightly worn that it is almost impertinent to refer to it; as well might one congratulate the strongest porter at Waterloo Station on the ease with which he handles an attaché-case. Secondly, a knowledge of human nature that prepares you for what you will find a few years later in the novels. Thirdly, a wit so insidious that it crops up as though by accident and is present everywhere, whether (as Belloc says) Baring is laughing at his subject, or his subject is laughing at you.

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If you want to enjoy *Diminutive Dramas* at the extreme stretch of enjoyment get children to act them. I have been lucky enough to see several acted at girls' schools; for instance, *Catherine Parr*, *Alfred and the Neat Herd*, *Ariadne in Naxos*, and *The Fatal Rubber*, after which you shrank from the idea of their being played by grown-ups. Baring has seen admirable performances of them by members of the crew on board a man-of-war; but these must have been extra-delightful specimens of grown-ups—almost as good as children!

The odd thing is, that in a conversation-piece like *After Euripides's Electra*—six pages of dialogue such as one might hear to-day at a supper party after a *première* in London—the characterisation comes out as drastically as the most blasé play-goer can desire when spoken by a child. It seems as if those everlasting types stand forth all the more sharply for lack of the trained actor's art—the woolly, sentimental *Hegeso*, *Timaretta* the absurd, for ever quoting Apollodorus (a "real person" whose opinions should be passed on); the highbrow dramatic critic *Demetrius*, and the rest of the company—sneering, mud-slinging, damning now and again with a fragment of faint praise, while the only person who ventures to say straight out that he enjoyed the play immensely is Socrates!

Probably the most amusing one to see rendered by children is *The Fatal Rubber*—a scene taken straight from the home life of some of Baring's greatest friends which was easily transcribed *verbatim* as it occurred regularly every night at skat, or vindt, or whatever was the after-dinner game. When it comes to throwing down your hand and rushing in a fury from the room, while your partner leaps from his chair and upsets the card-table, the heights child-actors reach can be imagined!

Turning the pages I remember with amusement that sometimes these incomparable completions or extensions of an historical scene will blend as time goes on—if your memory is vague enough—with what really happened. I remember having merged the conversation quoted in *Dead Letters* between "Sir R. Clay" and "Herr Müller" with genuine Goethe annals, believ-

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ing I had read about that meeting in the Campagna in Gundolf's *Life of Goethe*. "Odd!" said a German acquaintance; "I've read the book but can't remember that episode. Are you sure you didn't read it somewhere else?" Suddenly I recollected it is an invention of Baring's that occurs in one of the *Dead Letters* called "Herr Müller!"

In the same way a friend once spoke of the wonderful touch in *King Lear* where Goneril, who had just turned her old father out into the storm, writes to Regan that the weather is so wretched that "the poor little ponies on the heath will have to be brought in." Informed that this was a Baring touch, she was much disappointed—for Shakespeare, I mean, who hadn't thought of it! As for the underdone egg and Henry VIII, everyone who has read *Catherine Parr* knows that this scene occurs daily at thousands of British breakfast tables between eight and ten a.m.

In these sketches Baring's profound knowledge of human nature comes out more dazzlingly and is more tersely conveyed and more variously formulated than in any literature I know. You have here inimitable pictures of "mœurs," like *From Saturday to Monday* and *The Cloak*; ugly little tragedies like *The Greek Vase*, *Xantippe and Socrates*, *King Cophetua* or *The Drawback* (which, though excruciatingly funny is really a heart-breaking little story); black, terrible tragedies like *King Lear's Daughter* (already referred to), *Lady Macbeth's Trouble*, *The Death of Alexander*—(a *Diminutive Drama* I greatly admire)—or unadulterated comedy like *Cleopatra at Rome*, *Caligula's Picnic*, *The Capreas Regatta* and dozens of other little masterpieces. As one closes the book it is a comfort to reflect that the same hand has fashioned the Essays and Short Stories we are now coming to, though a reproach that can justly be levelled against Baring is, that of late years he has not let the fountain of his extraordinarily personal humour play as generously as one might wish; possibly because he was mainly preoccupied by what are called more serious issues. But if you possess the secret of making people laugh, is any gift better worth keeping in working order? For laughter is almost as good a balm for suffering hearts as sleep!

XVII

ESSAYS AND SHORT STORIES—(a) "PUNCH AND JUDY"—(b) "HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE"—(c) "LOST LECTURES"

FOR some years I had not read the contents of the above books methodically; and to-day, finding that, like good wine, their flavour has meanwhile improved (indeed, what is more like certain vintages than good literature?), one is conscious of a slight feeling of embarrassment. Its nature can best be explained by quoting passages from one of the essays called: "As it Strikes a Contemporary," which incidentally dispersed that embarrassment.

If, says Baring in this essay, a reviewer is called upon to write about an enemy, he is tempted to be too spiteful—or, worse still, too magnanimous; if about a friend, he feels inclined to press the soft pedal too frequently on the strong chords of loyal and genuine admiration, lest the music should sound extravagant, and himself be jeered at by posterity as a biased fool. In the end, however, confronted by the necessity of discussing poetry for which he has great and genuine admiration, and which happens to be by one of his greatest friends, the turn his thoughts take is this.

He notes that the world is still rocking with laughter at certain judgments passed by dead and gone authorities; (for my part I always think of Voltaire who declared that Guibert, the soldier for whom Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse died of love, was a far greater writer than himself, and of Dr. Johnson who scarified *Lycidas*). Baring therefore comes to the conclusion that "you never can tell," and that it is best to forge ahead courageously and record our honest and very likely fallacious and absurd estimates of our contemporaries. And if by so doing we give posterity a good laugh, what does it matter?

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This sums up the final feeling of the present writer who is dealing with the work—much of which has been known almost by heart for years—of a friend. Shall one at every other bar have recourse to the soft pedal, or, worse still, keep a foot glued on to it as if someone with a bad headache were in the next room? No! I think a good musician should use both pedals according to his discretion. If you embark unsolicited on a book of this kind it is probably because you admire the author, so why be pusillanimous about the loud pedal?

Koko says in *The Mikado* that if His Majesty tells off a gentleman to be killed, the Mikado's will being law that gentleman is as good as dead. "And if he is dead, *why not say so?*" Similarly with an author, if you think he is not only alive in every sense of the word but enduringly alive, *why not say so*, although you are not the Mikado, or even Katisha his daughter-in-law elect? And if, to passive (or active) objectors your view seems all wrong, need one mind stepping for a moment into the company of Voltaire and Dr. Johnson?

Of course, some of the items in this collection are better than others—a peculiarity the author shares with all writers of Essays and Short Stories. But one can safely say that in these three volumes there is not a page that was not worth writing, nor one that is not worth reading.

* * * * *

(a) "PUNCH AND JUDY"

Punch and Judy (1924) contains three of the most important essays Baring has written. One of them is *Sarah Bernhardt*. In *The Puppet Show of Memory* (1922) he had already given her a chapter to herself in which he speaks of "the incredible future moment when she will leave us." But through this second essay, written immediately after her death in 1924—wrung from him, one would say, under a sense of the blackness and void that the disappearance of her presence left behind—runs a different note,

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a strange, almost physical pain, as when something is torn from us which we had counted on holding fast for years. For Sarah never grew old, because her spirit was able and willing to serve the novitiate which, according to La Rochefoucauld, awaits every human being at each new stage of his life. She had lost her leg when one of the chief triumphs of her career was scored—the twelve performances she gave of *Athalie* after the war, for one of which all the theatres in Paris closed, to give the whole theatrical profession a chance of witnessing this example of her incomparable art. And when she died, though over seventy, she was still finding new things to do—things that she, and she only, could do—so that death caught her acting for the films.

All great writers are able to make you see visions that will haunt you as long as life lasts. Which of us who has read Stella Benson's *Tobit Transplanted* will ever forget Seryozha splashing stark naked out of that Korean river with a huge live salmon clasped to his bosom? This gift Baring possesses; witness his choice of illustrative incidents, whether (as I said before) in a campaign, or in a life that he is describing. For instance, many people have heard how Sarah Bernhardt, taken by her mother as a little girl to face the entrance examination for the Conservatoire, instead of choosing a tirade from Corneille or Racine, began reciting La Fontaine's fable, *Les Deux Pigeons*; and how, before the first two lines,

*Deux pigeons s'aimaient d'amour tendre,
L'un d'eux, s'ennuyant au logis . . .*

had passed her lips, Auber, who was head of the Jury, interrupted and told her that she was admitted. On the other hand, many have *not* heard that story, and Baring tells it again as striking prelude to what was to follow—sixteen years of unremitting work almost without recognition. And we are left reflecting that an early heartening seldom spares even genius a wrestle against crushing forces such as Sarah was prolonging on her death-bed.

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When a poet describes peaks of artistic achievement like the acting of Sarah or the combined acting and singing of Chaliapine (the greatest figure I have ever seen on the operatic stage), he is able, by a combination of imagination and word-magic, to make people who never saw them realise what these great ones did with our nerves, our hearts, our intelligence. Thus when Baring tells us of Sarah as Phèdre, seated on her golden throne, rigid with horror, uttering the words: "*Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains*,"* reflecting that, her own father being judge in Hell, there is no refuge for her either on the earth, in the sky, or under the earth—reading these words we ourselves become rigid with horror. When he recalls Chaliapine singing Schubert's *Doppelgänger* and says it seemed as if all the sorrow of all the poets—Dante's bitterness, Shakespeare's pity, Dostoyevsky's agony and reconciliation—had been distilled and melted into the notes of this song; Russia's undying sorrow and unhealed pain, and everybody's sorrow and everybody's pain . . . this is exactly what, without realising it, that vast audience at the Queen's Hall was feeling. "Even the policemen at the top of the gallery," he says, "were spellbound." Only a poet can describe like that; but as long as such portrayals of the art of such as these are available, their art has not quite died with them.

On the practical side his remarks are always such as budding artists could not do better than meditate. In the essay on Mrs. Patrick Campbell he remarks that, as we know, she leaped into fame at the outset of her career, and never reached a higher summit of success than in her marvellous Mrs. Tanqueray, whereas her subsequent career gave one the impression of spasmodic spurts followed by haphazard make-shift. He allows that the theatrical profession is the child of compromise, the creature of circumstance, and so was Sarah's career *afterwards*; but behind it lay the time spent at the Conservatoire and those sixteen years of unremitting toil in the best repertory, at the best possible school of acting and artistic experience, which nothing could take away or efface. And he points out that Ellen Terry

* "Minos judges all pale mortals in Hell."

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and Mrs. Kendal seemed to have learned to act ever since they were born. Thinking of which things, I remember George Henschel saying to me many years ago, "A young fellow came to me to-day asking me to teach him the part of *Christ* in the *Matthew Passion*, as he had to sing it three months hence and had never seen the score till to-day. I said to him: 'My dear fellow, it took me two years' hard work to study that part!'"

In all Baring's notices of great executants (and there are many in the books now under consideration) the accent is always laid on what seems to be the sound basis of their performance. His admiration is never a mere blaze like the set piece at a display of fireworks; he cannot help going into the deep country of the why and wherefore and making you think. To come back for a moment to Sarah, few things are better calculated to brace the courage of the disheartened than the way he handles a career like hers; and that is one of the reasons why, I believe without aiming at it, he is a great moral force. I shall venture to elaborate this theme by and by in connection with his novels, but re-reading these Sarah-essays one realises it afresh. "She made the best of the inevitable," he says, "and from the beginning to the end of her career *she turned her limitations into virtues.*" What a helping hand stretched out to all would-be artists!—(and not only to artists either!)

In the judgment of the present writer, the first three essays in this volume, *Punch and Judy*, *Sarah Bernhardt*, and *Gilbert Sullivan* fight for supremacy, and perhaps one may be forgiven, as musician, for privately putting what is coming above all the rest.

What a wonderful evening that was—22nd June, 1922—when the *Gilbert and Sullivan* lecture that figures in this book was delivered at the Royal Institution by Major Maurice Baring, while Major Geoffrey Toye, seated at the pianoforte, illustrated the points made by the lecturer with excerpts from Sullivan's divine music! The public was a choice public, I allow, but from the moment when the unique character of this art was driven

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home by the remark, that even as no English cook can make French coffee, nor any foreigner fry eggs and bacon, so English soil alone could have produced Gilbert and Sullivan—from that moment, I say, to “God Save the King,” cries of delighted acquiescence and roars of laughter were cut short by the agonised “hushes” of those who dreaded to lose a word of what was coming next.

One could have listened to that Baring-Toye combination all night. The lecturer began by asking himself whether Sullivan’s music has ever received the recognition it deserves. The high-brows, he maintained, are always prone to talk patronisingly of anything that quickly takes their fancy. “In art the ponderous, serious, complicated and unintelligible is at once respected; but if a poem is rhythmical and well-rhymed, a tune gay and easy, a picture pleasantly coloured with a subject that is perfectly plain, so that a field looks like a field and not like the forty-second problem in Euclid, the pundits invariably harbour suspicion.”

I wondered where, in my youth, I had heard similar words uttered by someone in a rage. Then I remembered. It was Gustav Mahler, the giant who was successively stoned out of Leipzig, Hamburg and Vienna (in Vienna they stoned him right out of the world) for refusing to tolerate the government of Art by Finance—Gustav Mahler inveighing against the critics for scorning, pooh-poohing, laughing at the newly-discovered *Hoffmann’s Tales* the *première* of which, he had conducted the year before at Leipzig.

A fact was then mentioned that is often on the minds of Gilbert and Sullivan lovers who were alive and taking artistic notice during the last fifteen years of the last century, namely, that the insulting patronage, the condemnatory faint praise, the pricking as of fraudulent bubbles that went on in the Press, never really affected the fortunes of these masterpieces. It possibly put them out of fashion in London for the time being, for one remembers that at the successful revival at the Prince’s Theatre in 1922, the Upper Ten, as they used to be called, seemed to become aware for the first time of their existence. But in the

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provinces there had never been even a short period of suspended animation, the Gilbert and Sullivan seasons having pursued their course on the model of those of nature.

That night a new idea was started by Baring, who said that if one day in the distant future people were to talk of the age of Gilbert and Sullivan as we talk to-day of the age of Pericles, it would not in the least surprise him. He further developed this idea by remarking that a time may come "when people will confuse fact with fiction, and the children of the future will think that trials by jury in that amusing age were conducted to music, that pirates and policemen hobnobbed at Penzance, that Strephon the Arcadian shepherd brought about the reform of the House of Lords, that the Bolshevik Revolution took place in Barataria, and that the Suffragist movement happened at Castle Adamant."

I think it takes a man of Baring's calibre to have conceived this Gilbertian extension of his thesis, and further to maintain, as he does in the same Essay, that if some people have compared Gilbert to Aristophanes, this is not, as certain other people have declared, a wild comparison, but a perfectly sound proposition, inasmuch as the lyrical beauty of the choruses of the Greek poet *is more than supplied by the music of Sullivan.*

Of course, it is open to anyone who thinks it worth while to object that Aristophanes did all his work himself, whereas, when alone, both Gilbert and Sullivan were relatively unsuccessful. One may point out that apparently Nature, and certainly Greek art, did not turn with horror from the composite, witness the three or four statues of hermaphrodites that have escaped the fury of the Church. But the really serious answer is, that only one thing matters, the creation of works of art. Gilbert and Sullivan both realised, I fancy—and the knowledge did not always make for harmony—that they needed each other. Doubtless Gilbert guessed that his incredibly suggestive manipulation of words could be immortalised by Sullivan's strangely similar genius for manipulating crotchets and quavers. Together the

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two horses were harnessed to the chariot, one occasionally wishing to go to the left, the other to the right (I have an amusing reference in a letter of Sullivan's to such moments), but together they pulled it to the summit of Olympus.

Whether or no you agree with the objectors, this remark about Aristophanes cuts deep, and as I said before, few people in England except Baring are in a position to make it. As a rule, trained musicians—"the real people" in that art—are not child-like enough, not pure enough in heart to see God in the guise of music such as Sullivan's. (Donald Tovey might perhaps; I will ask him.) And for that reason the opinions of amateurs who are naturally musical have always interested me more than those of my own clan, except of course one or two people of genius. Amateurs don't bother about what is the right thing to admire, and consequently have not tampered with their instincts. Unfortunately it is not always easy to get at their views, because here in England they have an exaggerated respect for the professional musician and are apt to be apologetic—which troubles the waters of sincerity. But it can be done!

Now Baring, though an amateur, not only has music in his veins but is in all respects an artist to his finger-tips, and in days when I was able to enjoy concerts there was no one I would rather have at my side. Consequently all the musical remarks this essay contains are interesting.

He says the most salient and supreme of Sullivan's gifts is melody (though I think the rhythmic invention is just as striking), and he has a sufficiently trained all-round intelligence to notice one of the things which, as he says, is the hall-mark of great art, Sullivan's "gift of discretion," of leading up to an effect in such a way, that when it comes it seems as sudden as a spring shower, yet as inevitable as a flower opening. Again he says that the exquisite lyric in the *Yeomen of the Guard* "Is life a boon?" might have come straight out of an Elizabethan song-book; here he is speaking, I fancy, both of words and music, but the half of the remark that is a musical judgment is essentially sound.

On the other side of the combination he is of course still more

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at home, and his recognition of Gilbert's genius is far warmer, far better motivated, than that of most people. He sees the boldness of his imagination, also the verbal precision of lines such as those of the girl in *The Sorcerer* whose father is now provided with a true and tender wife:

"She will tend him, nurse him, mend him,
Air his linen, dry his tears;
Bless the thoughtful Fates that send him
Such a wife to soothe his years!"

"Who," asks Baring, "except Gilbert would have thought of the phrase 'Air his linen, dry his tears'?" Who indeed!

Of the quality of Gilbert's imagination, perhaps at its most brilliant in *Iolanthe* where we are in the centre of a Gilbert-created Cloud-Cuckoo-World, he remarks that the fact of his having created a fairyland of his own is often overlooked. Credited with the supreme honours of topsy-turvydom, so that whenever anything peculiarly contrary to common sense happens we call it Gilbertian, as a rule he is not accorded the glamour of magic. Children, says the child-loving Baring, are the sole competent judges in that world, and they know that if *Jack and the Beanstalk* as played at the Hippodrome, with political allusions and music-hall tags, is all very well, the land of *Ruddigore*, *The Gondoliers*, *The Mikado*, *Iolanthe* and *Patience* is the real thing.

About *Patience* he recalls a fact worth remembering. When that revival of 1922 was planned, many commentators in the Press and in private life objected that *Patience*, which deals with a specifically nineteenth-century brand of folly, would be incomprehensible to-day. That prediction proved to be a piece of twentieth-century folly. Gilbert knew that where there is genuine art there will always be exaggerated imitation; that real and sham admiration always go together, and that the equivalents of the Grosvenor Gallery young men with their lilies and their tea-pots, and the Du Maurier young ladies, "haggard from adoration, green with love and indigestion," will always be with us. For which reason *Patience*, when revived, was as fresh as "the flowers

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that bloom in the spring, tra-la." And who wrote this mordant, in some places far from good-natured satire on a certain section of society? The Aristophanic W. S. Gilbert!

Towards the end of his lecture Baring recounted an anecdote to which I think there is an allusion in some other book of his, probably *The Puppet Show of Memory*. "I remember" (he says) "once during Holy Week at Moscow, when there was a fair going on at the Kremlin, seeing a little old man hawking about some gold fish in a very small bottle. He kept on piping out in a high falsetto:

'Fish, fish, fish, fish . . .
Little gold fish! Who will buy?'

But the people bought toys and sugar-plums, clothes and books, boots and old odd volumes of *Punch* and John Stuart Mill and Mrs. Humphry Ward. No one would buy the little gold fish, for men do not recognise the gifts of Heaven, the magical gifts when they see them. In the case of Gilbert and Sullivan they bought at once; but they thought that gold fish were as common as dirt. It was only when the sellers were dead that they realised that what they had been buying so easily and so cheaply was magical merchandise from fairyland; that there was nothing to match it, and nobody else to provide anything of that kind any more."

This is, of course, true, but I see nothing here for tears, or even surprise. Fortunate combinations happen on other fields; in horse-breeding, for instance; and in chemistry they are happening all the time. A familiar instance he himself points out is a happy marriage at which the bridegroom is dressed in blue, the bride in white, and the matchmaker's name is Mr. Seidlitz. But in art I know not of a case dimly resembling Gilbert and Sullivan. That two such men ever met is a miracle which I greatly fear will never happen again.

The essay entitled *Punch and Judy* is so amusing, so utterly the last word on the drama, that I cannot make up my mind to tear

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it methodically limb from limb; but there is no harm in quoting a few passages at random, just to give an idea of the fun and the wisdom that await the reader.

(1) *On Classic Calm.* When Mrs. Jarley tried to explain the quality of her waxworks, little Nell asked a dangerous question. "I never saw waxworks, madam," she said. "Is it funnier than *Punch*?" "Funnier?" said Mrs. Jarley in a shrill voice, "it is not funny at all, it is calm and classical."

(2) *On Drama.* Either drama happens, or it does not happen; and if it is not happening, not all the runaway trains, not all the motor-bicycles in the world leaping over them, not all the mirages in the Sahara will make it happen. *A railway accident is not drama.*

(3) *A Rehearsal.* While Tree was rehearsing *Macbeth* I attended several rehearsals. One afternoon he was rehearsing the last act. There was a scene at the back, and an embryo portcullis somewhere. Macbeth's army was being played by private soldiers of the Coldstream Guards. They were dotted about on the stage in their red tunics, carrying light canes. In the foreground stood Beerbohm Tree in his ordinary clothes, and wearing, I think, a jewelled helmet. Nothing could have been more incongruous than the outward appearance of that act as it was played that afternoon to an empty theatre. In the stalls were a few friends. And yet no sooner did the actors begin to speak their words than the attention of the scant audience, of the supers on the stage, of the scene-shifters in the wings, was held. And when Tree, hardly raising his voice, spoke the speech which begins: "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow," which I have always imagined Shakespeare was made to write in at the actor's bidding, the effect was overwhelming. He was making no effort and the verse was allowed to do its own work.

A few nights later I was present on the first night, but there was so much dancing, so much music, so many floating ghosts and whirling witches, and such a wealth of unexpected detail and business, that one had not time to listen to the words and the play seemed the whole time to be standing still. One felt that all that colour and change had been a waste of money, and that the audience would have been held in a far tighter grip had they been able to witness the play in the undress-clothes of rehearsal.

(4) *On Scenery.* If you read reminiscences of the great plays

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and great acting of the past, who is there who ever recollects or even gives a passing word to the scenery or the mounting?

(5) *On the Play*. Not long ago I heard two scenes from *Macbeth* played by schoolboys aged eight, nine and ten at a day-school in London. As the magnificent words came through their high-piping trebles, the acting being indicated by their ingenuous and unsophisticated gestures, I felt that I was hearing Shakespeare for the first time. The play came to you direct without any admixture of art or artifice. *The play was the thing*.

(6) *A Relief*. To go back to *Punch and Judy*, what acting could add anything to that tremendous drama? What a relief to think that the audience, standing there in Tottenham Court Road, did not go away saying: "She was very good, but that's not my idea of a Judy."

(7) *On "Punch and Judy"*. Remember this, that in spite of its being a tremendous drama, *Punch and Judy*, unlike the wax-works, *is* funny.

Yes, that is a splendid article!

There are over thirty essays in this volume, and they are divided into three categories: *Miscellaneous Essays* (to which belong the three I have tried to give an idea of), *Authors and Books*, and *The Stage*. Some of them are exhaustive, like *Taine*, *Goethe* and *Victor Hugo*, *Racine*, *La Fontaine*, *French Poetry* and *Eleanora Duse*; some short and poignant, like *Ariadne in Mantua*, which I hold to be Vernon Lee's masterpiece, and *The Cenci*.

Finally there is one among the Miscellaneous Essays called *A Place of Peace*. The author has no idea who invented, devised, and founded this Paradise, and remarks that, "like many of the world's greatest benefactors, like Mr. Umbrella, Mr. Macadam, Mr. Martini, and Mr. Soubise, he is known by his work alone"; adding that his statue, made of pure gold, ought to be placed in Trafalgar Square.

We are informed that the place lies east of the sun and west of the moon; or, to be more precise, north of Waterloo Station, south of Marylebone Road, west of Ludgate Hill and east of the Albert Memorial; and those who have read the essay and not

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gathered what it is about must be few and far between. Still, for the sake of people who, like the present writer, are bad at guessing riddles, one may reveal that the establishment in question is a Turkish Bath, adding that to put this fantastic essay into the weighty group described as Miscellaneous is an authentic Baring touch.

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(b) "HALF A MINUTE'S SILENCE"

This book, which appeared in 1925, absorbed into itself an earlier work, which, under the title of *Orpheus in Mayfair and Other Stories and Sketches*, was published in 1909 and had finished its course. And as it contained some of the best stories Baring ever wrote, one was thankful to see them safely housed in Messrs. Heinemann's complete edition.

Half a Minute's Silence is divided into Part I (Russian stories) and Part II (Other Stories), the first being made up of short sketches of Russian life which have never appeared elsewhere and three or four longer ones from *Orpheus*. The second part consists almost wholly of *Orpheus* material; hence one may affirm that three-quarters of the present book were written before 1909.

A very literary Russian friend of Baring's once said that he particularly enjoyed reading the work a writer had turned out before his style was formed. Now an interesting point about Baring is that there is nothing of a beginner's fumbling about his early work; he seems to have jumped into his style at one bound. And in order that readers may judge for themselves, where one of these pre-1909 stories is being dealt with, it shall be furnished by a ◇.

The sketches in Part I fill you with amazement and dismay. One is about a *pogrom* (or raid against the Jews) planned no one knew by whom—for in that part of the country the Jews were very popular—and equally inexplicably called off at the last moment. Your head whirls, and turning the page you come upon the terrible slaying of a much-prayed-for baby, a "wise

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woman" having put about—again you do not know why—that it was the Antichrist. Another story is about a young and charming girl of good family, whose sympathy with the wrongs of Russia had induced her to "turn red," as her friends jocularly called it. One day she is provided with a bomb, lots are drawn, and it falls to her to kill her uncle, a dear old soldier who adores her and to whom she is devoted. When the time comes she prefers to use the bomb against herself.

The name-story is of quite another character. In it nineteen waistcoats and blouses are replaced by magic panes of glass through which the thoughts of nineteen bosoms are perceptible for a space of thirty seconds . . . a fantastic idea worked out with the writer's delicate and characteristically human imagination. But these few pages do not counterbalance the depression caused by those other peeps into a civilisation in which such tragedies can occur. Of course most of these sketches concern a time of political upheaval, but not all. Not, for instance, one of the most frightening of the Russian stories, *Russalka*, ♦ which is so brilliantly told that on first reading it I said to myself: "Obviously this must have happened at Sosnofka!", the Benckendorffs' home, but for fear of being laughed at I never asked!

Russalka is the name of a water-nymph who haunts rivers and marches and lures young men to their doom. A young peasant and the girl he loves were about to marry, and the peasant was helping the carpenter to construct some wooden steps and a small raft for the convenience of the landowner's bathing guests. One evening he came home like a man in a dream and said he felt ill. But with the prescience of love the girl guessed that he had caught sight of the *Russalka*, whom legend described as a woman dressed in reeds and leaves, her face very pale, her eyes large, green, and sad. Next day the girl implored her lover not to go down again to the river—but in vain; and the end of this terrible story is that towards evening, when his dead and dripping body was brought to the village, the girl's reason left her.

But all the stories in Part I are not harrowing! Two of them connect with the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, and never, I

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think, has Baring written anything more moving, more beautiful.

The first is called *The Flute of Chang Liang*. ♡ It reads almost like an authentic experience, but probably it is merely the dream of a poet, who, disguised as a war correspondent, went through that campaign with the Russian Army. However, for the sake of convenience we will call the dreamer Baring.

He represents himself as passing the night before the battle of Liao-yang in a Chinese homestead five miles to the south of the town, where, in the course of the war, he and his companions had often broken bread—in the shape of eggs and Indian corn. The house was now deserted, for everyone knew the Japanese were on the move and that there would be a big battle next day. The sunset faded; from the hills in the East came a few shots, and a captive balloon soared into the Eastern sky like a soap-bubble. Baring strolled through the empty village and came upon a deserted little wooden temple, whose painted gods, though bereft of their priests and their dues, grinned away as cheerfully as usual. As he sat down on the mossy steps of the temple, came the sound of some sort of primitive wooden pipe, repeating over and over again a monotonous, piercingly sad little tune—a tune more Eastern than any Russian tune, yet it seemed unlikely that any Chinamen would be about. A vague recollection of a Chinese poem or legend he had read in London about a flute-player called Chang Liang came into his mind, but his memory refused to work, and overcome with drowsiness he fell asleep.

Then, it seemed to him, he awoke. The earth was misty although the moon was shining; he was no longer in the temple but once more on the edge of the plain. "They must have fetched me back while I slept," he thought. Strange to say the millet had been reaped, the plain was covered with low stubble, and on it were pitched curiously-shaped tents guarded by soldiers. But these soldiers were Chinamen unlike any he had ever seen; some of them carried halberds, the double-armed halberds of the time of Charles I, and others the kind with a crescent on one side, such as were used in the days of Henry VII. And he then noticed

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that a multitude of soldiers were lying asleep on the ground, armed with two-edged swords and bows and arrows, and their clothes were unfamiliar and brighter than the clothes Chinese soldiers wear nowadays.

Suddenly a note of music came stealing through the night; for a moment it seemed to be the tune he had heard before he fell asleep, but presently he was sure this was a mistake, for the sound was richer and more mellow like that of a bell, but of an enchanted bell such as is fabled to sound beneath the ocean. The music rose and fell, rose and fell, dying away in the distance and then sent back by the hills, till the whole night was filled and trembling with an unearthly chorus. The sleeping soldiers stirred, sat up, and listened spellbound; the sentries stood motionless as bronze statues in front of the tent, and in their eyes tears glistened. From the tents came men in glittering silks, generals he supposed, and listened also. No word was said, but one by one, as though obeying a secret word of command, the whole army marched off eastward into the heart of the hills, and presently not one man was left. . . .

Then the music changed and seemed to become more familiar; with a start he awoke and found himself sitting once more on the temple steps, and not far off the Cossacks were singing round a fire. He then remembered the legend that had haunted him; it was of an army that on the night before some battle had heard the flute of Chang Liang. By his playing he had brought before the rude soldiers far-off scenes of their childhood, the sights and sounds of their homes, the faces and spots which were familiar to them and dear. And as they heard that music a longing for home seized them so imperatively, that one by one they left the battlefield in silence. And when the enemy came at dawn they found the plain deserted; the flute of Chang Liang had stolen the hearts of eight thousand men.

The above is taken almost verbatim from the book, but the last exquisite page and a half I will not give here.

The whole of the second Chinese-Russian story, *Chun Wa*, ♦ shall be wrapped in like silence. Written with the reserve that

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in later life was to dominate his novels still more sternly, this is perhaps the most perfect short story Baring has ever written. Not harrowing on the lines of some of its predecessors, it is so replete with human tenderness that, however dry-eyed readers may have become with years, they will be apt to break down quietly over *Chun Wa*.

The story in Part II called *A Luncheon Party* ♦—one of the most amusing stories I ever read—has always seemed to me a masterpiece that Baring alone could write. Most of the guests were people well known in London—Messrs. Beerbohm Tree and Bernard Shaw, Mr. Gosse, Mrs. Tree, Sir Edgar and Lady Helen Vincent, Mr. Winston Churchill and others—all, of course, furnished with pseudonyms and so presented that though they were easy to identify no one can have been hurt. One of the guests, Count Sciarra, was that most splendid of originals, Count Pasolini of Rome. Wise, witty, learned, at times outrageous in conversation but always a great gentleman, the five or six sentences allotted to him give you an exact picture of the man, including his profound remark that if Shakespeare were among us to-day we should not notice his existence—that he would be just “*un monsieur comme tout le monde*”; and then he added in a low voice, “like that monsieur sitting next Faubourg” (Bourget).

The point of this remark is as follows: The hostess, Mrs. Bergmann, a typical American *arriviste*, had made a compact (signed with red ink instead of blood) with Mr. Nicholas L. Satan, of 1 Pandemonium Terrace, Burning Marle, Hell, giving him the control of her soul for ten million years after her death (leap year to count as 365 days and 13 years as 12) if he would produce Shakespeare as lion at this luncheon party. Incidentally Mrs. Bergmann's crony Angela had bullied her by telephone into letting her bring an old friend who was staying with her and whom she couldn't very well leave. When the two arrived, Mrs. Bergmann failed to catch the name of this fattish, inconspicuous, ill-dressed stranger whose appearance she considered would wreck her party.

Meanwhile no Shakespeare turned up, and at last they all went

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down to luncheon, Mrs. Bergmann explaining that the vacant chair was for an old friend they would all be delighted to see, who would probably arrive late. It was to be a surprise, so she wouldn't name him, and the inconspicuous stranger was dumped down next M. Faubourg, who, like everyone else, more or less cold-shouldered him.

The surprise-guest failed to put in an appearance. Mrs. Bergmann, realising that Mr. Satan had cheated her, was furious, and the guests reluctantly went away, feeling that they had been made fools of. At last, when everyone, including the shabby stranger had gone, Mrs. Bergmann asked Angela, who was still lingering, what her friend's name was. "Oh, didn't I tell you?" answered Angela. "How stupid of me! It's a very easy name to remember; Shakespeare, William Shakespeare."

The Cricket Match ♦ and *The Thief* ♦ are two of the many barbed arrows Baring has let fly at Preparatory Schools; and other favourites of mine are the exquisite couple *Fête Galante* ♦ and *The Garland* ♦; also *The Man Who Gave Good Advice* ♦, which sounds like a life-like portrait of somebody (perhaps it is!), and *Dr. Faust's Last Day* ♦, about which is a strange aloof dignity.

There are two absolutely terrifying non-Russian tales, *The Shadow of a Midnight* ♦, which I believe is a true story, and *The Island* ♦. In fact, in this volume Baring betrays a gift for making your flesh creep of which one is glad he never made much use, for in his net were fish better worth frying.

When the earlier book was amalgamated with *Half a Minute's Silence* a few items were sacrificed, and I regret particularly that among these was *A Chinaman in Oxford* ♦. This extremely shrewd and amusing study, which I hope is not lost for ever, is splendid medicine for people suffering from a very common disease, insular prejudice; and though it is no good talking about what, to all intents and purposes, has disappeared, I must just quote the Chinaman's final remark. In a polite and quiet way he had refrained from expressing unbounded admiration for our institutions; and when at last, pressed by the Englishman to allow that if our streets smell horribly of smoke and coal, our people are

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clean, he replied: "No doubt; but you forget that to us there is nothing so intolerably nasty as the smell of a clean white man."

No one can say Baring is not a good Englishman, but he rarely neglects a chance of rubbing in the other side of a question!

Reading two of the new stories in this volume, one is struck by this author's kinship with Private Willis in *Iolanthe*, who "often thinks of things that would astonish you." If *The Alternative* (a dream) is sufficiently fantastic, imagination takes a still bolder flight in the story entitled *Habent sua fata libelli*, in which you learn that though part of the Library of Alexandria was burned A.D. 642 by the Caliph Omar, thanks to the zeal of the scholar who superintended the work of destruction the classics had been saved and stowed away secretly in a vault in the heart of the desert. The man who tells this story—a stranger Baring met in the course of the Great War and never saw again—can vouch for its truth, for he had visited the vault himself many many years ago. And, for reasons which, as related here, sound quite plausible, he had helped the friend with whom he was travelling to burn these papyrus!

This tale has haunted the present writer ever since it appeared. One remembers Sir Bernard Pares' remark about Baring's uncanny gift of guessing the unprovable; perhaps somewhere in the heart of Sahara there really is such a vault, the only incorrect part of the guess being the destruction of these papyrus! O for another Sir Richard Burton (unaccompanied by Lady Burton) to go into the matter!

* * * * *

(c) "LOST LECTURES"

And now we come to the last book in this particular section—a book hailed by some of us with rejoicing that equalled that of the *Hausfrau* in the parable when she found her lost piece

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of silver. "What," we had often asked each other, "has become of the gay spirit of yore?" We were not unreasonable enough to pray for a return of the Triolet epoch; the tearing spirits which cause such flowers to bloom are an appanage of earliest youth. But what of the more chastened yet even more original comic vein that found expression in *Diminutive Dramas* and its two companions; in the fantastic *Round the World in Any Number of Days*, which we shall come to presently; that got to work in Mrs. Bergmann's *Luncheon Party*; that even, as we shall see, flickered deliciously in the grave pages of his first novel, *Passing By*, published in 1921, but in none of its successors. Would that delectable stop never be pulled out again?

Then, quite unexpectedly, in 1932, appeared this book, in several pages of which the high spirits might be those of a boy of twenty, only that underneath them lie the sharpened perception, the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of four decades!

To begin with, what an enchanting progress up the literary ladder; first the private school—more amusingly, more scathingly treated than ever—followed by a description of Eton by one who is drunk with a worship of the place that would upset the equilibrium of almost anyone except Baring. (The other day a rather icy, judicial old Etonian well over seventy told a friend of mine that he had read that chapter three times and was now going to read it for the fourth time!) Finally we are treated to a fantastic blend of our two leading Universities, at both of which it may be remembered, Baring had vainly tried to learn the multiplication table. I am told that when this lecture, *Oxford and Cambridge*, was delivered, it caused such uncontrollable laughter, that the lecturer had to abandon an intended peroration, and pull up, as he does in this book, at the Roman Candles—than which nothing could be better as final set-piece.

Of the succeeding essays each is perfect of its kind. In *Stimulants* there is a wonderful portrait of Mrs. Cornish—a difficult person to draw, I should imagine, but probably this likeness will have satisfied her children—and a sketch of her husband, the beloved Vice-Provost of Eton; only a couple of pages but they

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tell a stranger all he needs to know. And there is an elaborate and touchingly affectionate full-length picture of Vernon Lee. It is characteristic of Baring that, however it may have been in his youth with matters financial, he simply cannot help paying debts of this other kind, as may be noticed not only in *Stimulants* but in every biographical word he has ever written.

These essays are full of moral significance; indeed I am coming to think that acute observation combined with unlimited sympathy, ends in the supremest sort of *cleverness*. And in Baring's case this cleverness comes out in a series of effortless epigrams. On every other page of the *Lost Lectures* (as in *The Puppet Show of Memory*) you come upon paragraphs that hand you the matter in a nutshell. Occasionally the crammer Mr. Scoones would arrive at his chambers with an extra-carefully tied black satin tie, an expression of moment, and announce than an Ambassador had died; which meant a vacancy in the Service; which meant an examination. The geography master, a Yorkshireman, always described foreign countries in units of Yorkshire. "Such and such a country," he would say, "is almost five times the size of Yorkshire." Then there was a delightful Monsieur Esclangon who gave as subject for an essay: "*Aimez-vous les uns les autres: c'est beaucoup dire. Supportez-vous les uns les autres: c'est déjà assez difficile.*" It was a quotation from some book, he said, but Baring failed to trace it to its source.

In the essay called *The Nineties* he tells us there were men you used to see at balls but never anywhere else. They disappeared with the linkman and were rolled up with the red carpet and the awning during the winter. And he heard Albani sing *Isolda* "in her best Balmoral manner" (I should like to have shared this experience). He also gives a short account, followed by a still shorter obituary notice, of the famous *Yellow Book*, which, he says, began like most English Reviews with a galaxy of stars, ended by being written largely by the editor, and then died. But to quote even a few of the good things in *Lost Lectures* is foolish, the book itself being one single "good thing" three hundred and odd pages long.

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This picture of life in *The Nineties* destroys many false notions and replaces them by others that are true, good-natured, surprising, funny and witty by turns. In the latter category belong phrases like: "Most of the more important public events from 1891 until the Boer War took place in private" (and this statement is documented). He also remarks quietly that owing to the battle of Omdurman having been such a success, "Lord Kitchener was ultimately put in charge of the Commissariat in the South African War; and some experts say he disorganised the supply of mules."

Diplomacy is an inimitable picture, or as he calls it screen show, of the sort of life Baring himself led for four years. And though tedium was sometimes relieved by incidents such as a diplomatist who was high up in the service deciding to type his own dispatches, the result of which was a dispatch to Lord Salisbury beginning with the words: "My D O R L" instead of "My Lord" (Baring himself reached this stage but never got beyond it); and though he starts this lecture by an endeavour to make it "excruciatingly clear" that he is "not attacking the diplomatic career, or anything else," one cannot wonder that literature appealed to him more than diplomacy. Nevertheless, a scene in this chapter concerning King Edward VII and a boat—a slightly surprising but more than slightly comic scene told with the utmost decorum—makes one rejoice that in the year 1900 Baring was still a diplomat and at Copenhagen, otherwise he would not have been on the Royal Yacht on that occasion.

One remark in this essay is rather to the point to-day. He tells us that during the Dreyfus case, nothing else was talked of in Paris from morning till night, so that the novelist Edouard Rod said one day: "What on earth shall we talk about after the *affaire* is over?" But no sooner was the verdict made public (Dreyfus had been found guilty, with extenuating circumstances) than the topic died. After four o'clock that afternoon (he says) it was never mentioned again!

But as we know, the time came when it was very much mentioned again, and the unfortunate officer was pronounced

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innocent. Now in these days of feverish Press activity, we have engrossments with topics that at times seem likely to end in dementia. (In one house I know of a rule was made that a certain name was not to be mentioned till five-thirty p.m.!) Yet there comes a moment when the matter suddenly slides out of focus, like the Dreyfus case. And then it is as though it had never been!

In *High Brows and Low Brows* there is one of the funniest descriptions I ever read of a conversation that took place in a St. Petersburg-Moscow train between two high-brows, one Japanese, one Russian, and Baring, in the course of which the Japanese affirmed that he had read "the English Novel"—all of it—but had never opened Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Marie Corelli or Conan Doyle. After which Baring turned to the Russian, who said that no such man as Shakespeare had ever existed, that *Julius Caesar*, which happened to be playing just then at Moscow, was "nothing"; and when asked about *Hamlet* said he supposed Baring meant *Gamlet*, that they had read it at school and then forgotten all about it. "It does not interest us," he added, "it is outside our Movement."

Then there was an encounter in yet another train with a Serbian Professor who complained that all Shakespeare's characters were mad—Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, Shylock, Antonio, King Lear, and even Romeo. "Was Falstaff mad?" asked Baring. "He was a metaphenomenamaniac," said the Professor, "a man who could not help altering facts and changing the facets of appearances."

"What we call a liar," suggested Baring. The Professor said that was an unscientific way of putting it, but it was true. Then he got out.

Here a discreet writer would harden his heart and tear himself away from *Lost Lectures*, but how shall one leave out an essay called *Poetry and the Moods of the Public* which is perhaps the most arresting of them all? In it certain things are said that may make some of us feel rather small. Speaking of difficult verse, Baring

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confesses to a weakness for poetry that he can understand at a first reading. "I prefer," he says, "poems which begin like this:

'It was many and many a year ago, in a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden lived whom you may know by the name of
Annabel Lee.'

or like this,

'They loved each other beyond belief,
She was a harlot and he was a thief.*

I prefer them to poems which begin like this:

'Polyphiloprogenitive
The sapient sutlers of the Lord
Drift across the window panes.'"

He then adds: "I am not saying that one is better than the other, nor that there may not be many who enjoy the latter more than the former. People have the right to enjoy both kinds." And now comes the true Baring touch: "I admire people who enjoy the difficult kind, and I believe them to be neither foolish nor hypocritical"

There he shows himself more patient, more humble than Montaigne, who, like Henry James, is merciless on literary obscurity, and who says: "*Les difficultés, si j'en rencontre en lisant, je n'en ronge pas mes ongles; je les laisse là après leur avoir fait une charge ou deux.*"† And he goes on to declare that his mind moves quickly, and that what he doesn't grasp at once he would never master by poring over it, *even if he wished to pore!* I don't know who is better advised, Montaigne or Baring; but what I endorse with all my heart is the latter's angle towards those with whom he does not see eye to eye.

Altogether this essay supplies the best thread I have come across for leading ordinary readers out of the labyrinth of their

* A translation by Robert Lord Lytton from Heine.

† "If in reading I come across a difficult passage I don't bite my nails over it, but make one or two attacks on it . . . and then leave it alone."

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own literary moods. In this same article, though confessing to a preference for poems that are easy to understand, he reminds himself that as a child he enjoyed Shelley's *Arethusa* without grasping that it was about a water nymph being pursued by a river god. But when he adds that now, though "disappointed, bald, and fifty-seven," he is no nearer Heaven than in those days of imperfect comprehension, I think he is mistaken. This generous and, to me, enthralling essay will, I fancy, have carried him a step or two farther along the heavenward road!

* * * * *

One word to bring this section to a close. Glancing at the many estimates of other authors, expressed in *Lost Lectures* and elsewhere, it occurred to me that experts on matters literary may miss the gentle little digs (there are one or two, but not many!), the slightly disparaging little asides that would seem to belong to the reviewer's art.

Let us admit that Baring is almost impermissibly appreciative of other people's work, and constitutionally averse to the picking of holes. Having said which, I will only presume to point out that he is made like that, whether in *Life* or *Letters*. But on this matter of appreciativeness I should like to give the reflections of three wise men: Oscar Wilde, Goethe, and Renan.

(1) Wilde, as we all know, declared that only mediocrities admire each other; and Baring points out that if poets seldom care for each other's poetry it is not because they are jealous (though sometimes they are jealous) but because their vision and their mode are so individual that they cannot put themselves into the skin of another artist.

[*But sometimes they can.* Goethe admired Byron passionately, and put him far above all other living poets; and Byron admired Shelley so much that he said: "If people were to admire Shelley, where should I be?" And Shelley, Charles Lamb, and many others admired Keats. So objectors should not quarrel with Baring appreciativeness.—E.S.]

(2) When Eckermann was accusing someone (I can't remember

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whom) on that very same count, Goethe remarked: "It is not always the best stomachs that are the most fastidious."

[This statement required, and got, obvious qualification; but it is a nice remark to remember!—E.S.]

(3) Renan said: "*La valeur morale de l'homme est en proportion de sa faculté d'admirer.*"*

[This, I venture to state with great humility, is my own opinion, and in the course of this study it has come home to me with renewed force. And therewith *Basta!*—E.S.]

* The moral value of a man is in proportion to his power of admiration.

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XVIII

"THE GREY STOCKING" (1908)—"THE GREEN ELEPHANT" (1911)
—"THE DOUBLE GAME" (1912)

PEOPLE who are not playwrights themselves feel diffident about discussing plays. On the other hand, anyone acquainted with stage-land in any shape is aware that success is a hair-trigger business. Not to mention extra-diabolical happenings, such as Hamlet stepping backwards off an out-jutting part of Elsinore battlements and breaking his leg, or Lady Teazle's wig catching in, and coming down with the screen [which I myself saw happen in amateur theatricals at Aldershot Camp when I was a child], some quite ordinary yet unforeseeable circumstance will sometimes spoil a first night, and defraud an author of a run he had every right to expect.

Then again, even if on the first night all goes well, no human being can foresee how the public will react. I suppose if you asked a bird why he chooses this branch rather than that as rostrum for his morning canticle he might be puzzled to tell you; and the public would be equally unable to say why they enjoy this play and not that. It is all a great mystery, and as for knowing beforehand which way the cat in the auditorium will jump, the other day I came across the following passage in a letter from Mr. Bernard Shaw: "Nothing but actual trial will settle whether a play will get a rise out of the public or not." And he went on to make the following very interesting remark: "There are two ways in which a play may catch the British Public. One, which is the heart of the B.P. going out to the

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play, is comparatively calculable; the other, which is quite incalculable, is that the B.P. takes a fancy to the play."

But sometimes the ground you are on is still more uncertain, and one recalls incidents showing that experts are as liable to be wrong as ignoramuses. Again we know how, in the domestic grate, a fire which seems at the last gasp will suddenly, and for no explicable reason, pick up; and the same thing must constantly be happening in the theatrical world. My own very small experience yields a memory of Lillah Macarthy remarking sadly behind the scenes, that if *Fanny's First Play* did not do better by the end of the week, it would have to be taken off. Well, on the Thursday (I think it was) the frost broke, and to some purpose, for *Fanny* ran for two and a half years.

These remarks are not as irrelevant as they may appear, for re-reading the three first of the Baring plays noted above, all three of which have been performed in England (the fourth was produced at Vienna and the fifth has never been given at all), it looks as if two of them at any rate should have caught on. All five are delightful to read, and though one readily allows that doesn't mean everything, it surely goes for something?

Pre-War

Baring's first play, *The Grey Stocking*, was written at the request of Mr. St. John Hankin for the Stage Society. It is more or less in the style of Chekhov, with whose work few people in England, except Baring himself, were at that time acquainted. The Stage Society turned it down, but Gertrude Kingston threw herself into the breach, and it was produced, and very well played by a scratch company, at a *matinée* on May 28th, 1908.

This was the author's first experience of a cruise in England's theatrical waters. As was absolutely inevitable, given the circumstances, the cast kept on being changed during rehearsal; I believe three or four different actresses rehearsed the chief part

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and had to give it up because they were wanted elsewhere. Eventually it was played, and exceedingly well, by Lilian Braithwaite.

The reception was very warm, and if I don't remember details of the performance it is because there are crises in most lives during which you can receive impressions but they don't bite in deep. During a certain famous dash between Scylla and Charybdis, no doubt the light-hearted gambolling of the waves, the fantastic outlines of the rocks, the incredibly beautiful effects of water, clouds, and sunshine in South Italy were as entrancing as they are to-day, but Ulysses and his companions will not have remembered much about it afterwards.

So it was with me as regards that *première*; but here is a letter from Mr. Bernard Shaw written next day which is far more to the point.

10, *Adelphi Terrace*.
1st June, 1908.

MY DEAR BARING,—

I thought the play quite successful, both as an experiment and in the ordinary way of the stage. I have only two cavils to make. I think the scene in the last act, where the Johnny in the brown suit told Miss Braithwaite that he knew that she was in love with the other man, was questionable, partly because it was abominably indelicate of the brown bounder to force a confidence on the woman like that (she would never have forgiven him for it), and partly because you had already worked this stunt for all it was worth, and concerning the same man, the Russian, with another couple. The second cavil is at the first act. On consideration, however, I withdraw it, and approve of the first act. It was heroic to impose all that twaddle on the audience, and to insist on their being patient with it and reflecting on it and even æsthetically enjoying it merely as twaddle, in stupendous contrast with silent omnipresent reality; but the old Adam in me rebelled against such a waste of opportunities for so many good old stage laughs.

I fear I express myself very coarsely: I have just been talking to an American who has only two nouns in his vocabulary. One of them is "stunt," and the other is "proposition". . . .

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I do not see why the dickens you should not go regularly into the trade of playwriting. I thought that some of the scenes in *The Grey Stocking* showed a very rare sort of dramatic tact—a power of letting go a thing at the right moment instead of wallowing in it and getting hopelessly messed up with it, as most of our good, thick, average professionals do. The real difficulty of course is that you draw Society as it really is, and not as our good public conceives it. Also they take the bogus criticisms quite seriously. Not even ——'s clowning prevented them from taking that judgment of current literature, which she fires off before leaving, otherwise than with Tennysonian seriousness.

Yours ever,

G. BERNARD SHAW.

This letter I never saw till lately, and being conscious myself of a weakness ascribed by the writer to the old Adam for a "good old stage laugh," it is satisfactory to find oneself in such high company! But on another point I venture to disagree with Mr. Bernard Shaw. Speaking as a woman, I think Sybil (the heroine, played by Lilian Braithwaite), whose life has been based hitherto on the brave lie that she was a happy wife, must have felt it a relief when the secret of her love for Peter was dragged from her by an old friend she liked and respected, who asked nothing for himself, and of whose feeling for her she now for the first time becomes aware. In fact, I think that here again, as almost always, Baring's psychology is sound.

To conclude the story of his first theatrical venture, a second matinée of *The Grey Stocking* was given in June, and that was the end thereof. What happened on this occasion is an old story on the English stage; and I gather that Mr. Shaw had similar experiences with his early comedies. By the time something original is produced in all seriousness—by which is meant, put on an evening bill and deliberately steered for the open sea—it is often too late. In 1908 a play like *The Grey Stocking* was an almost unthinkable proposition, whereas now it would be taken as a matter of course. This delay should not (and does not) affect its

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value as a work of art, but it is not till a writer has pulled off one or two big successes that managers flutter the leaves of his past non-successes and say, "What about giving this another trial?"

* * * * *

His second play, *The Green Elephant*, for which again Gertrude Kingston stood sponsor, was unfortunate in that the producer had to be changed at the last moment, which of course caused a good deal of criss-cross rehearsing. At that time (1911) I was up to the neck in the militant suffrage movement; a fact mentioned solely in order to rub in that, in spite of circumstances calculated to distract one's attention, I thought it the greatest fun, and noted once more how sharply the characters were drawn, how clear-cut the scenes, and like everything else Baring has written, how true to life, how original in the best sense was this play.

One vignette remains with me. Near by sat Baring's servant, an ex-soldier, and his friend Nathalie Benckendorff's maid; and though I allow these two will have been favourably disposed to start with, and that the difficulties of the heroine's maid (whose chief function seemed to be retrieving objects lost by her mistress that day, that month, or that year) will have appealed strongly to one of the two, nothing can have been more spontaneous than their laughter; nor their tense anxiety as to how an ancient middle-aged love affair that ran through all the acts would end. And I noted their relief when, in the very last line of the play, the lady emerged from the room where He and She had been confabulating and announced that they were going to marry!

The theatre was full of quite ordinary playgoers, and looking round you saw that from start to finish many were as amused and thrilled as my two. The reception was described to me years after by Baring as "one of those good receptions that mean nothing." There are such, of course, and sometimes you can't make out why an initial success leads to nothing. But having studied these happenings for years and years, I must add that

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often, if you go into it carefully, the mystery is highly explicable; only the explanation can't always be published!

As regards this particular play, here is an anecdote that illustrates the uncertainty of life in Theatre-land. The French playwright Bernstein was present; I don't know that he thought it a good play, but on one point he had no doubt; "What will you do," he asked Baring at supper, "with all the money you'll make?" "I don't think it'll run," said Baring. Bernstein replied with emphasis, "I *know* it will! I'm a judge of these things and I *know* that a play like that will run."

Alas! Bernstein was mistaken—*The Green Elephant* ran for a week or ten days, but not more. True, it was given rather late in the season and during the worst heat-wave on record; and, perhaps because the critics were inspired by the weather, it got a terrific roasting in the Press. I do not know to what extent these unfavourable factors affected the issue; but the author, whose judgment in such matters I wholly mistrust (for occasionally he gets "skunners" against one of his works), thinks that though, some day, very brilliant light acting might make something of it, *The Green Elephant* is a "tiresome" play and deserved its fate. I can only say that re-reading it twenty-six years after that performance, I am more than ever of the opinion expressed above. And some day a revival may prove that Bernstein's estimate was correct.

* * * * *

The last of the pre-war bunch, *The Double Game*, which, alas! I never saw, was produced on May 7th, 1912, at the Kingsway Theatre with the idea of giving it at a series of matinées, and, should the public be appreciative, transferring it later to an evening bill. The start was most auspicious; according to the author, the acting was excellent (though he thought that the two leading parts were wrongly cast), the reception genuinely warm, and after the performance all the actors came round to congratulate him. "This time," they said, "you've got a real success,"

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and a very friendly Press was of a similar opinion. But it proved to be less of a draw than was expected, and never worked its way into an evening bill, though some, including I think Mr. Bernard Shaw, thought that if put there it would have pulled its weight.

XIX

"HIS MAJESTY'S EMBASSY" (written 1912)—
"JUNE—AND AFTER" (written after the War)

Post-War

THE three plays just described were brought out in a single volume by Messrs. Constable. Another group was published in 1928 by Messrs. Heinemann in a volume called *His Majesty's Embassy*, the contents of which are the play of that name, *Manfroy Duke of Athens* (already discussed among the *Poetic Dramas*), and a second prose play, *June—and After*.

To take the last play first (though I believe it to be the only one Baring has written since the war), from the point of view of the plot people might think it must be a farce. But it is nothing of the sort. It is high comedy, and though, handled by another writer, it might seem fantastically impossible, here it seems the most natural thing in the world.

Its fate is interesting. After it had been lying fallow between two covers for some time, an enterprising German lady obtained Baring's permission to translate it into German (a task that was admirably accomplished) and see what could be done with it. Eventually it was accepted at the Burg Theatre in Vienna, and on May 22nd, 1926, Baring went over for the *première*. It was extremely well acted and very well received; indeed, after the second Act, which ends on a situation that cannot fail to amuse and intrigue, the author had nine calls.

The Press, too, was excellent, and the *Neue Freie Presse* remarked that if the Management could persuade Herr Baring to prolong his stay in Vienna and appear on the stage at the close of each performance, the Box Office haul would beat all records,

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inasmuch as the public would never tire of seeing the "*charming awkwardness* with which the author hurries away from, rather than acknowledges, applause!"

The Burg is, of course, a Repertory Theatre, where runs are mercifully unknown; but everybody, including the author, who is not apt to take roseate views of his prospects on the stage, thought that *June—and After* had come for a good long stay. After three or four performances, however, it was dropped, and Baring does not think it had "any particular success." He did not expect it to be a Box-office trump, but fancied it would find a comfortable nest in the repertory. And in spite of this disappointment, I make bold to say that, properly cast and sufficiently rehearsed, *June—and After* should succeed anywhere, especially in England, where the sort of middle-aged romance it turns upon has an everlasting appeal. Look at marriages such as . . . , and . . . , or again . . . , and . . . ,! But better not launch into illustrations.

* * * * *

His Majesty's Embassy—a skit on diplomacy, written, I believe, before the war—has always ranked for me as one of Baring's masterpieces, and I only found out while writing this chapter that the best of all judges (of whom more presently) is of the same opinion. More than once I have asked the two or three actor managers I know why on earth it has never been performed, and the answer was always the same: the almost impossibility of getting together an adequate cast. One quite sees the difficulty; the inhabitants of Embassies are somewhat a class apart—as are sailors, though the analogy must not be pushed too far—and fitting representatives thereof do not grow on every stage gooseberry-bush. When Sardou's play *Diplomacy* is revived it always seems quite easy to cast, but in a letter given in Letter Section No. II, Mr. Bernard Shaw explains why the case is not in fours with that of Baring.

Anyhow, of this I am certain: plausibly and faithfully acted, it would show as characteristic and unchanging a facet of English

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society as do the Dover cliffs of England's seaboard. Conceived in the most light-hearted of veins, although a passage in the first Act hints at possible tragedy later on, the dialogue and many of the scenes are as intensely amusing as they are true to life. The side characters are drawn with a sharp pencil and every biting line tells; the Third Secretary, Bobby, an irresponsible youth of great charm, who declines on principle to do a stroke of work or reflect on possible consequences; the odious second-rate wife of a secretary higher up in the service; the one bounder in the group of younger men, and his hand-to-hand fight with the infuriated Bobby of whom he is jealous—how good they all are!

The love story which pursues its hopeless course in the midst of this conventional world, told with the avoidance of emphasis which was to become the chief hall-mark of this writer, is strangely moving. How quiet, how deadly quiet is this part of the play! Here, for the first time, you come across a Baring trait upon which, as was said in the Preface, foreign reviewers are for ever harping; the creation of a calm polished surface beneath which the personages of the drama are to be seen; now struggling helplessly in the stranglehold of passion, now finding and desperately clinging to the only talisman that may open up a road to peace, but never permitted by their artificer to shatter the film he has spread between their agony and the outside world. There is something in this strong law of Baring's nature, which, as I ventured to hint early in this study, reminds one of the indifference of nature to the anguish of the living creatures that crawl about the globe under her ægis. Yet it is impossible to find a writer more humane, more pitiful of heart than Baring; and I fancy that somewhere in the folds of this curious combination lurks the spell he casts on those who love his work.

To return to the play, in the case of the lovers, Madame San Paolo and the Ambassador, this method of exposition is extraordinarily poignant; were the play performed, with what a contraction of the heart would one hear the guard's whistle at the fall of the final curtain, knowing that the train that carries San

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Paolo and his wife away is starting, and that never in this world will she and her lover meet again!

In conclusion; though the general tone of the play is that of a comedy, it will leave you fuller of pity and admiration for the untold millions of mortals who smile and smile though gradually dying of sorrow, than almost any short work you have come across. Rather a remarkable thing to have achieved in three short acts . . . yet . . . *that play has never been produced!*

If one had not ceased to wonder at anything that happens—or does not happen—in a country where it is considered unnecessary to subsidise either drama or opera, I think the history of these two plays, *June—and After* and *His Majesty's Embassy*, would make you stretch your eyes.

In the case of *June—and After* you have an English play accepted by a world-famed theatre that, according to European opinion, takes rank with the *Théâtre Français*, and played in what is probably the most art-loving capital in the world. *But in England it has not been performed!*

As for the case of *His Majesty's Embassy*, let us consider the position of Baring as regards the stage. True, he has had no "real success," so far, but could such a thing have been possible? Except in the case of strong specific stage-talent, such as that of Oscar Wilde or Bernard Shaw, what can a writer expect who goes his own way instead of following the line of least resistance?

I have described as faithfully as I know how the circumstances under which the first three plays were produced, and it would be the same to-day at a first production of any unknown playwright's work. Perhaps *The Green Elephant* was extra unlucky; anyhow, in what appears to have been the only really warm and appreciative review, the writer declares that to bring it out at the end of the season, with insufficient rehearsing, was a mistake; "in fact," he said, "this delightful play had no chance at all."

Here are Baring's comments on these remarks:—

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"This criticism, although friendly and well-meant, is not altogether just or well-founded. It was extremely enterprising of Miss Kingston to produce it, and but for her it would certainly never have been played at all. One could perhaps with justice blame the *casting* but not the acting. Miss Kingston got the best company she could and the actors were *good* actors; they were praised by most of the newspapers, and some of them certainly deserved the praise they got. Miss Kingston played the leading part herself and she played it very well. Nor is it fair to say the play was under-rehearsed; the trouble here was that towards the end of the rehearsals a new producer took charge—too soon to do nothing, and too late to make any effectual changes. The result was what inevitably happens when you swop horses in mid-stream. Nevertheless, considering how difficult it is to get a play done, it was more than lucky to find someone like Gertrude Kingston who was ready to risk, and probably achieve, nothing but failure and loss of prestige.

"Of course, the better the production and the more perfect the cast, the better will a play fare, but *any* production is better for the playwright than none at all, because it is only when a play is actually acted and faces a public in a theatre that you can judge its qualities and effects, and see how it behaves behind and across the footlights."

As for the two plays that have not been seen here, all you can do is go by the opinion of experts who have read them. I have already quoted Mr. Shaw as strongly advising Baring, after *The Grey Stocking*, to go on writing plays, because in G. B. S.'s opinion he evidently had a gift that way. Since then, two other Baring plays had been performed, and Mr. Shaw has had plenty of time to reconsider his opinion. So if he had changed his mind, nothing would have been easier, given his own honesty and Baring's great modesty, than to have said: "My dear fellow, my advice is . . . *give up writing for the stage*."

Instead of that what do we see? In Lillah MacCarthy's book *My Friends and Myself*, I find the following paragraph in a letter from G. B. Shaw to her on p. 299: .

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23rd January, 1912.

Read the enclosed play *His Majesty's Embassy* by Maurice Baring. It is so exquisitely on the nail just now, as a picture of the Foreign Office, that it is positively a public duty to do it. Lady Lytton wants to do a play to build a church in the new suburb that has grown up around Knebworth Station. A performance by real society people (if only they could be heard) with you and Martin Harvey as the actor and actress in the play in the last act, would make a splendid vogue for Baring whom we really must nurse as playwright.

A few days later he wrote to Baring informing him of the suggestion he had made to Mr. Granville Barker. Of the play he says:

"It is quite a miraculous success, and if we could only begin the entertainment with an indignation meeting about Persia, in which we could rub in the absurdity of the Foreign Office, and finish up with the play, it would be an immense go.

"I suppose it is not a commercial proposition as far as the big market is concerned; but it is just the thing that Barker ought to try at matinées. . . . *If it were attractively cast, anything might happen. . . .*"

Thus our greatest playwright—a man who has probably had more experience of the stage, and is able to sift that experience with a greater amount of brains than anyone in the world!

Meanwhile, as one closes this chapter, the final phrase of that letter of his to Lillah MacCarthy rings ironically in one's ears: "*We really must nurse Baring as playwright.*" If such are our ideas of nursing, step forth, Sairey Gamp—step forth unabashed from the Shades, and give us a few lessons!



Countess Sophie Benckendorff.

XX

"ROUND THE WORLD IN ANY NUMBER OF DAYS"

THE Author of the above book and the present writer are alike in that neither of them ever misses a chance of dragging in Dr. Johnson. And as Baring is very near-sighted, it is only natural to quote a remark of the almost blind Doctor to the effect that he had no wish to travel to far countries in order to see birds fly which he could not see fly, and fishes swim which he could not see swim.

Aware that nothing roused the Doctor's indignation more than anything dimly resembling a paradox, no wonder his interlocutor refrained from pointing out that charming travel-books have been written by people whose sight is defective. Yet such is the fact, and Baring's book is a case in point.

One of its characteristic features is that quite half of it is not about travel at all. Again and again the traveller's eyes turn from the outside scene to listen to the memories it has set vibrating. At Tilbury Docks he boards a liner bound for New Zealand, and as night falls they pass Brighton, where he is in the habit of spending hilarious week-ends. He watches her lights kindling, and murmurs what he tells us is a line from a hymn: "Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away." Suddenly he remembers travelling from London to Portsmouth in a third-class carriage full of bluejackets, and how one of them, seeing a man sitting on a stile, says: "Nice easy job that bloke's got, *watching the tortoises flash by.*"

Next morning they are passing the South Devon coast, where his boyhood was spent, of which enchanted years we have in *The Puppet Show* such an exquisite description. He now asks

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himself whether there really is something peculiar in the azure of the sky, something luminous, hazy, yet radiant, borrowed from the seas of South Devon, or is the impression due to the unfading glamour of childhood? . . . A real Devonshire shower comes on . . . the lights on Plymouth Hoe are twinkling—far ahead the Eddystone Lighthouse flashes intermittently, while lines from Newbolt's poem *Drake's Drum* ring in his ears:

“Yarnder lumes the Island, yarnder lie the ships
Wi’ sailor lads a dancin’ heel-an’-toe,
An’ the shore-lights flashin’, an’ the night tide dashin’,
He sees et arl so plainly as he saw et long ago. . . .”

To-night those lines are almost intolerably appropriate.

* * * * *

. . . They arrive at Gibraltar. His chapter on it takes less than four lines and is as follows:

"Most people have been there. For those who haven't
it looks
Exactly as it does in books."

We stopped there only three hours."

(A critic recorded his opinion in a printed book that this chapter was "incomplete and inadequate.")

* * * * *

They arrive at Naples. He hears a Neapolitan singing an Italian song at its most nasal sentimental pitch: "One of those squalling, pathetic, imploring, slightly flat love songs—the best of all love songs because they express real love without any nonsense; plain love, unendurable, excruciating love—the love Catullus sings in one of the shortest of poems, *Odi et amo*: (I hate and love; and if you want to know how that can be, I can't tell you . . . but I feel it and am in agony).

Of the Red Sea he remarks that on the first day you say it is

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pleasant; on the second you say how exaggerated are the stories told about the heat; on the third day you begin to feel it, and on the fourth day you are living night and day in a Turkish bath without a cooling-room. One of the stokers, a Maltese, goes mad and jumps overboard. The steamer stops, but nothing can be done. There are lots of sharks.

* * * * *

. . . The Indian Ocean, and at last the Southern Cross! How did Dante know there was such a thing? (here he quotes the famous passage). Some commentators no doubt say Dante's meaning was allegorical, that by the four stars he meant Woman Suffrage or the Battle of Waterloo. Baring doesn't agree with them, and begins talking about the way Dante describes scenery in one line that remains with you for ever. Some English poets can do this, he allows, and he quotes the magic line from Crabbe:

"And on the ocean slept th' unanchored fleet."

Bereft of its context, travelling solitary like a meteor across a page of print, how a line like this launches you on a sea of similar visions, as Baring knew when he published his *Alga* (of which more by and by). Nothing brings the mystery of beauty more shatteringly home than the isolation of a few undying words.

* * * * *

They arrive at Ceylon, and a fresh mango is described. The other day in a Club an old Indian was heard to remark: "I don't know much about Baring, but I read a book in which he describes a fresh mango. . . . By Jove, there's description for you!" Speaking of "its infinite variety," Baring likens it, among other things, to St. Thomas's description of the beatified vision; but this is only one detail in an outburst of raving, and probably was overlooked by the old Indian who might have thought it profane—that is if he had understood the reference. Dining at the Hotel in Colombo, he at once recognised hosts of Kipling's characters; Mrs. Hawksbee is spotted instantly, also Pluffles, Reggie Burke

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and others. As for the native charming snakes in the veranda, that of course is Strickland, disguised as a conjuror.

* * * *

The ship moves on. . . . They are in the Doldrums and one of the ship's officers tells him a terrifying maritime ghost story. It wasn't one really, but when the solution is presented, so simple, so natural is it that you don't feel a bit let down; on the contrary, having shared the terror of the ship's company, you are pleasurably affected by the explanation. Incidentally Baring tells a queer ghost story he himself lived through at that derelict cottage behind North Street already described, in which he and Belloc once kept house. Alas! that evocative relic of the past has been superseded by hideous erections no self-respecting ghost would deign to haunt.

* * * *

And now at last Sydney. You can't say much about a place like Sydney after a stay of only twelve hours; but while there he learned that Andrew Lang was dead, and this strikes out of him a beautiful little appreciation of one, whom, at this moment, as happens to all great men for a while after their death, it is the fashion to sneer at. For this reason it is a comfort to meet once more in the Sydney pages Lang's wonderful translation, *Golden Eyes*, in which, as Baring observes, he has performed the miracle of turning an exquisite Greek poem into an exquisite English one. Meanwhile what is said about Sydney—the excellent book stores, the hospitality of the inhabitants, the gaiety of the town, and the beauty of the bay, which, he assures us, exceeds all expectation—leaves you with a more definite idea of the place than is to be gained from various comparative-minded, argumentative, and instructive authors whose works you have patiently plodded through in your time.

* * * *

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Owing to the usual unaccommodating nature of maritime time-tables, Baring's stay in New Zealand was not a lengthy one. But after short, sharp mention of three or four chief sights, not to have seen which caused him three or four short, sharp pangs, he writes: "All the same I have had a glimpse of New Zealand such as no books or pictures could give me, and I have consequently enriched my store of experience and extended the frontiers of my outlook" (rather what humble beings without a classical education feel when they have worked through a play of *Aristophanes* in translation). Meanwhile those few days did for him what he does for his readers, and those who have always had a romantic hankering after New Zealand will close his book with a still wilder longing to go there.

* * * * *

Before quitting this particular geographical point (Wellington), for one farther north that might give rise to still more heated reflections in like vein, one asks travelled readers if they can give the reason for what looks like a conspiracy among different lines of steamers to defraud passengers of a comfortable sight of the places the boat stops at?

It is the same everywhere; and if you are travelling on a trading steamer—say, down the Dalmatian coast—that takes passengers as a sort of favour, of course you understand and do not complain. But in cases where to attract sightseers is supposed to be part of the game, though aware that this neglect of our legitimate desires comes from torpidity of imagination, in moments of heaped-up bitterness you cannot help suspecting the Company of gloating over your impotent wrath!

To go back to Baring's distressing knack of filling you with equally impotent travel-longing, you suffer under it more than ever after reading his seven or eight pages on Tahiti and Rarotonga, which he believes are bits of the Garden of Eden permitted to remain in the world in order to show mankind what they have lost by Eve's curiosity, Adam's disobedience, and the

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Devil's malice. But on one remark of his, to the effect that the opening of the Panama Canal would result in more steamers calling at Tahiti, one would like up-to-date information. Has that prophecy come true? Again, what about his conviction that nothing will ever spoil Tahiti? "It is the kind of place," he declares, "that will conquer civilisation rather than be conquered by it." One thinks of the quarter of a century that has elapsed since those words were written, of the wireless and all its attendant curses. (There are blessings, of course, but just now it is the curses one is thinking of.) Would a person who should visit Tahiti to-day go away murmuring with Baring that he felt, as no doubt Ulysses felt when force, or Penelope's letters, tore him away from the island of Calypso, that come what may *be bad* "*bad his dream*"? Or is the dream our author dreamed no longer dreamable in the South Sea Islands?

* * * * *

What one chiefly recalls about his crossing of the Pacific Ocean is, that whereas you are told that in the tropics there is no twilight, the most exact of all descriptions, according to Baring, is that of Coleridge in the *Ancient Mariner*:

"The sun's rim dips; the stars rush out,
At one stride comes the dark."

It is literally true that the second the sun goes down the stars become visible, but the dark that follows is not really dark; and according to his amendment, what comes next must indeed be, as he says it is, a wonderful sight.

Another point one remembers is his delight in the company of a football team bound for San Francisco, whose athletics and wild spirits generally transported him back to Oxford and Cambridge (I forget if it was on this cruise that over 800 glasses were broken). And he declares that from these best of good fellows—Australians with a sprinkling of New Zealanders—he learned more about their respective countries than he did when he was there.

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They land at San Francisco, and here follows what you can call the description of two passionate love affairs: one between the author and California, the scenery of which he boldly qualifies as the most glorious in the world; the other between him and American architecture. He says things about the sky-scrapers and the Pennsylvania Railway Station that bring to one's mind a sight to be seen occasionally at Liverpool and such places—a gigantic liner like the *Mauritania* in dry dock. Not an unnecessary curve or projection anywhere—only the supreme dignity of a thing fashioned solely to meet its own requirements.

It is, he says, the absence of "*twiddles*" that is the secret of the beauty of modern American architecture, and incidentally he gives a pleasing account of "that horrible thing called *Art Nouveau*": "It was born in Munich; its parent on the male side is Japanese, on the female side a bastard descendant of William Morris *via* Maple. It was brought up in Germany, fostered by what are called 'decadent' artists, whose works are a mixture of beer, sausage, and Aubrey Beardsley." And his concluding remark—a comment on Mr. Pennell's dictum that the sky-scrapers, seen from the sea, are better than Venice—is, that he doesn't care two pins for comparisons, but what seems to him amusing and important is that we live in a world so rich in invention and so various, that it produces and contains things so striking and so different as Venice and the sky-scrapers of New York.

The book comes to a rather untimely end, for at New York a wire informed him that *The Times* wished him to proceed at once to the Balkans (where war had broken out between Turkey and Bulgaria) as War Correspondent. In the agitation of departure a few final chapters of the book were mislaid, which rendered a posthumous and modestly sized *Finale* necessary.

In a work of this kind such happenings do no real harm, as was clearly indicated in a remark made by Belloc when the book appeared: "Spontaneous work," he wrote, "done by men of ability such as you, *or me*, or Raymond [Asquith], or Keats, or

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Aristotle, has a charm that the author never knows. It is just as well that authors do not know it, for if they did they would do nothing but spontaneous work; that is, they would lollop about."

I don't think Baring would ever have taken to lolloping as a habit. Anyhow, *Round the World* is the sort of book a man writes once and never again; not because he doesn't want to, but because he couldn't!

* * * * *

I have been trying to find out where, exactly, lies the charm this book exercises over people like myself who never let it out of their sight. For one thing there never was a more light-hearted book. Then, though in all long voyages there are hours upon hours of passivity, in the case of this particular writer that doesn't matter at all. A nothing, a passenger possessed by the idea that he is singing Brahms most beautifully in the Lounge, a well-thumbed book in a bookcase, some facial trick of one of the stewards, almost anything suffices to set Baring off on one of those disquisitions—sometimes grave, sometimes undisguisedly frivolous, sometimes merely a certain juxtaposition of words—that touch a deep-lying spring of thought in the reader and transport him into the heart of some vivid experience of his own. Such disquisitions remind you sometimes of Lamb, sometimes of Montaigne, but in their essence they are always pure undiluted Baring.

Again throughout this book I delight in the casual throwing-in of remarks that connect this and that experience in the most arbitrary and fantastic manner. For instance, when he says of a certain book fished out of the ship's library that it is one of those enchanting books that *read themselves for you*—just in the way that Italian servants declare crockery breaks. "An Italian servant will never say, 'the cook has broken a plate,' but 'a plate has broken itself to the cook.'" (*Si è rotto un piatto alla cuoca.*) However, to cudgel one's brains on the point is useless. There are a hundred ways in which a book—or, for the matter of that, a person—may

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charm you; but in one respect they are all identical; you cannot define that charm!

Yet stay! perhaps a clue can be found after all. At one moment Baring points out that so far the word "longitude" is not to be found in this book, nor, he adds, does it contain one scrap of information that could be of the slightest use to anyone. And when he asks, "Does it matter?" I am constrained to believe that at last I know why this book comes in my mind immediately after the *Odyssey*. I am not comparing the two; that would be preposterous, and I should say unthinkable in anyone outside a lunatic asylum. But as regards the sheer pleasure derived from being tied to this traveller and gently dragged in his wake over land and sea, the only other person I can think of who, in doing it, gives you exactly the same sort of satisfaction is . . . Ulysses!

XXI

"LETTERS FROM THE NEAR EAST" (1909—1912)

THIS book is a record of Baring's two visits to the Near East—in 1909 as correspondent to the *Morning Post*, and in 1912 as War Correspondent to *The Times*.

In 1909, to the delight of Liberals all the world over, the so-called Young Turks had proclaimed their intention of reforming Islam; and though a few old gentlemen in Conservative Clubs wished the new government had not dubbed itself "The Committee of Union and Progress," about which there was an uncomfortable suggestion of trades-unionism, all parties agreed to give up hair-splitting as to labels, and back the innovators with heart and purse.

Thus it came about that the *Morning Post*, having cast itself for the rôle of Balaam, mounted an apparently compliant and inoffensive animal called Baring, and rode into Constantinople prepared to shower blessing and encouragement right and left. Alas! the mount combined in its person the wisdom of babes and sucklings with the instinct of the beasts of the field; and whereas it had started on this journey full of oats and optimism, in less than no time it found itself unable to advance one step farther on the road of panegyric; and perhaps, if surmise be permissible, Balaam began to repent him of his choice of a hack. In such cases, rather than "let his newspaper down" (a phrase that soothes many a journalist's twinges of conscience) another sort of animal would only see what it was sent out to see. But this was not the way of the truthful (and also obstinate) animal in question, which, about the middle of June, might have been descried galloping westward down the London Road.

Whether or no Islam is capable of reformation has never been everyone's subject, but the humblest unit of a race that has a

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hand in the destiny of millions of unreformed Mohammedans may perhaps take interest in the Preface of this book, which gives an abstract of convictions expressed more than half a century ago by Sir Charles Eliot in his classical work *Turkey in Europe*; all the more so because these ideas underlied the policy of the present ruler of Turkey.

Baring wondered if this book of his might not be too out of date to present to the public of to-day. But, after all, he is writing of only twenty-five years ago, and personally I still enjoy reading how the first big attempt of Islam at self-reformation struck one who, unhampered by bias either way, assisted at that revolution, and ended by arriving at exactly the same conclusion as Sir Charles Eliot.

That conclusion was, that given the rigid character and unchallenged authority of the Koran, he who should expect the Turk of being capable of changing his ways was nourishing an illusion. And, of course, that in this our century a being like Mustapha Kemal could possibly arise and dominate the scene would never have occurred to Sir Charles or any other pre-war expert.

Meanwhile as there are Muslim States in which Kemal's writ does not run and where the authority of the Koran is still unquestioned, Sir Charles's analysis of the "cast-iron character of Mohammedanism" as contrasted with "the blessed elasticity of the Christian ethic" is still to the point.

"One of the most remarkable features of the Gospel," he maintains, "is its indefiniteness in the best sense of the word; that is to say, there is so little in it that is applicable to one place only, or to one epoch." He reminds us that what are usually considered the crying faults of the times in which Christ lived, such as idolatry, slavery, and various forms of cruelty and lust, are not denounced in the Gospel or even forbidden. Instead of this a general system of morality applicable to all ages is enunciated, which renders these and other sins impossible for those who practise it.

"The Koran," he says, "is the opposite of all this. Mohammed

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denounced idolatry, infanticide, and other evil customs of the pagan Arabs, somewhat after the manner of the prophets of the Old Testament, and he conferred an inestimable boon on Arabia by changing the existing condition of religion and society. Unfortunately, he also legislated in detail for the form of society he preferred. He legalised polygamy, slavery, and other things to which objection may be taken, and it is impossible to detach his theological teaching from his legislation."

"A liberal interpretation of the Koran," he goes on, "presents almost insuperable difficulties. The New Testament lends itself to many modes of treatment; both Roman Catholics and Broad Churchmen read it with approval; it was not composed by the founder of the Christian religion; it puts forward no claims on its own behalf, but appeals mutely to the succeeding ages to interpret it as best suits their need. The Koran, on the contrary, opens with the notable words: 'There is no doubt in this book,' and its precepts are put forward as Divine Orders. This gives Mohammedanism an enormous power as a fighting force and makes of it a mighty instrument for the conversion, drilling, and disciplining of savage nations; but the same characteristics become a source of weakness in the religion of a great State in contact with European powers. Much of Mohammed's legislation is wholly incompatible, not only with what is commonly called civilisation, but with commerce and other business which a nation must carry on if it does not wish to be left behind. . . . No one has ever disputed the genuineness of a single chapter, or even verse, of the Koran. . . . As the Prophet left his Church and State, so they are now and so they must remain—austere, rigid, unalterable, with only a curse and a sword-thrust for those whose institutions do not harmonise with theirs."

Seeing eye to eye with Sir Charles Eliot, it seemed to Baring that the only way out of the dilemma would be the exercise of gentle pressure on the part of a united Europe (for in 1909 many cherished the illusion that such a thing might yet be possible) to push the Turk back into Asia where he really belongs, and where he would be quit of the irritating Christian competition, to

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put an end to which Mohammed and the honour alike suggested massacre after massacre!

Having said all he did say, no doubt Sir Charles, who in many ways liked and admired the Turks, would to-day be as good a Kemalist as anyone. For when Kemal took on the Herculean task of recasting principles and practices that had obtained for over a thousand years, his arguments were identical with those Sir Charles would have used in his place. By one enactment after another the Dictator proved his belief that progress under the Islamic law is an impossibility, and to-day he may be said in some respects to have dethroned the Koran. The civil code adopted in 1926 entirely secularised Turkish legislation and freed it from Islamic influence; the Assembly was no longer to promise to execute the "sheri" or holy law, and the oath taken by those elected was not to be "by Allah," but "by my honour." The Caliphate was abolished, polygamy prohibited, and women were no longer required to wear the veil. Finally in 1928 the last step in secularisation was taken by removing the article that declared Islam to be the official religion of the Republic; further, Roman characters were substituted for Arabic in all official documents, and the fez was abolished.

The sacred law of Islam having ceased to be the law of the land, most of the conditions that made a Muslim State unable to govern Christian Minorities have passed away. No longer shall we catch ourselves turning, with feelings of mingled shame and boredom, from paragraphs in *The Times* about the awful things the Turks are doing to their Christian subjects somewhere. Possibly it is still true, as Sir Charles Eliot said it was in 1897, that "the Turk has a brutal unreasoning contempt for all Christendom, the contempt of a sword for everything that can be cut—and," he added, "to-day it is the stupid contempt of a blunt sword." But as things are now, that sword has to stay in its scabbard; moreover, as a matter of fact the present law suits the Christians as well as it suits the Turks, witness the lapse of masses of Christians to Mohammedanism.

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To go back to Baring; if in his book he did not gratify Europe's desire to see in the Young Turks a band of high-souled Heroes, he was among the first to point out that this could not be expected of foreign puppets whose strings were pulled in London. But like everyone who has come in contact with the genuine Turk, he is attracted by his character—especially by that of the poor Turk—his dignity, his self-respect, his hospitality, his perfect manners, and his infinite and never-failing courtesy.

* * * * *

As regards his second journey to the Near East, whither he was sent by *The Times* to report on the Turco-Bulgarian War, arrived at Sofia, he realised that it was impossible to get anywhere near the firing-line. The great battle of Kumanovo had been fought and won by the Bulgarians and their allies, and having fraternised with a wounded Serbian officer, Baring asked how it happened that the Turks, who all allow are the bravest of soldiers, are always beaten? The Serbian replied that a brother officer of his had put that very question to a Turkish prisoner; and the Turk, after the habit of his race, answered by an apologue as follows: "A certain man," he said, "once possessed a number of camels, and he worked them to the uttermost; and eventually became an exceedingly rich man. At last he fell sick, and knowing that his end was approaching he bade the camels draw nigh and addressed them thus: 'I am dying, camels, and I have most uncivilly kept death waiting until I have unburdened my soul to you. Camels, I have done you grievous wrong. When you were hungry I stinted you of food, when you were thirsty I denied you drink, and when you were weary I urged you on and denied you rest. And ever and always I denied you the full share of your fair and just wage. And now I am dying all this lies heavy on my soul and I crave your forgiveness that I may die in peace. Can you forgive me, camels, for all the wrong I have done you?'"

"The camels withdrew to talk it over. After a while the Head Camel returned and spoke to the merchant thus: "That you over-worked us, we forgive you; that you underfed us, we forgive

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you; that you never paid us our full wage, we forgive you; but that you always let the ass go first, Allah may forgive you but we never can!’” I feel sure that this sort of thing, gleaned during dreary days of vainly hoping to get within sound of the guns, must have comforted this particular one among the unfortunate war correspondents who were condemned to kick their heels at the base.

Meanwhile, moving eastward, first to Nish and then to Uskub—places recently evacuated by the Turks—he complained a little of the hardship of having to cope with yet another language just when he was beginning to feel more or less comfortable in Serbian. But, as we know, he picks up new tongues as children pick up measles, and according to his wont, was in perpetual contact with Serbians and Bulgarian soldiers, wounded and unwounded—a natural result of which was to contrast the two races. The Bulgarians reminded him of the Spartans in their moral discipline, their singleness of purpose, the intense concentration of their patriotism, and the laconic, unboastful style of their dispatches. This is all the more remarkable in that all Europe had begun by believing that the Turks would sweep the board. Yet not even in the Press, let alone in the fighting class, was there anything like self-congratulation. “They seem,” he wrote, “discreetly to ignore their achievements and their prowess.”

But observers who had more intimate knowledge of the people concerned than average European journalists, had foreseen this issue from the first, and an Italian monk explained to him at Sofia why it could not be otherwise. “I know this people well,” he said, “have lived among them for years, and never in my life have I seen such morally well-disciplined men. It was a foregone conclusion that such men would defeat the Turks. *I Turchi, poveretti, sono Musulmani.*”* (And I expect Baring was too polite to remark that once upon a time this had not stopped them from over-running Europe!)

Of the Serbians he had a slightly different though equally favourable impression. As full of concentrated fire of patriotism

* The Turks, poor fellows, are Mussulmans.

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as the Bulgarians, with the same power of cleaving fast to one great idea and equally incapable of boasting, they were less reserved than their allies and rejoiced openly in their victories.

Recalling Baring's phrase about the Bulgarians reminding him of the Spartans, one also recalls that the Spartans were not a literary people; and somewhere in this book he declares that after Serbian, Bulgarian seemed to him a sort of Russian patois with the consonants (or was it the vowels?) left out; also that their literature is negligible. Now Serbian (or Servian, as everyone called it then) is a great literary language with a mass of poetry and a store of beautiful folk songs and epics. Admirable as are the peoples whose watchword is "deeds not words," the bricks wherewith literature is built happen to be words, and, as George Moore always maintained, it is thanks to literature that the glory of a country survives. But for the poets, Falstaff might say of nations as he did of individuals: "Which of them hath honour? The one that disappeared yesterday." Or, as Byron said of the untold thousands who from time immemorial have been inhumed on the shores of the Ægean Sea:

"What of them is left to tell
Where they lie and how they fell?
Not a stone on their turf, not a bone in their graves,
But they live in the verse that immortally saves."

After 1912 I expect that everybody, except the people who fashioned the treaties, hated to see the reward of her great and victorious effort denied to Bulgaria. True, Bismarck once said that he could wish no greater misfortune to a country than the possession of Constantinople. Yet perhaps this dour, silent race might have succeeded where others would have failed—might have stamped out the Byzantine microbe and disinfected the Near East for ever. Given the hand-to-mouth way in which European statesmanship seems to function, one can imagine with what a pitying smile this suggestion would have been received at the time! Anyhow, it is too late to do anything about it now!

* * * * *

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Having extracted from the Gospel according to *The Puppet Show* and recorded elsewhere the remaining items of interest in the second part of this book, I should like to wind up with one of the lapidary remarks made by Napoleon, which Baring quotes in his last book, *Have You Anything to Declare?*, and which can be applied indirectly to his *Near East*. Translated the passage runs: "I would rather see the children of a village in the hands of a man who only knows his catechism *but whose principles are known to me* [the italics are mine] than in the hands of a half-baked man of learning who has no foundations for his morality and no fixed ideas."

Now *Letters from the Near East* is a very slight book, and makes no claim to be more than the impressions of a passing amateur. But even if the writer's style were not what it is, his views less clean-cut than they are, and the incidents he counts on to confirm them less happily chosen, what gives distinction and distinctiveness to Baring's journalism is its obvious integrity. For aught I know, his knowledge of the Near East may not be more than the equivalent of that curé's learning. But a man whose moral outlook is sound, who has fixed ideas on one or two matters of importance and is incapable of working up this or that detail into a significance to which it has no claim, merely because it is pathetic or showy, is the sort of observer whose record, in my humble opinion, has permanent value; and, unless on the point of a detail here and there that is of no importance to any but pedants, it can never be out of date. In fact, I should venture to say, speaking roughly, that whereas the skin-deep ages rapidly, the work of those who dig deeply enough is safe for all time.

XXII

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THE war put a temporary end to the literary activities of many writers. But before going on to the first important work Baring published after it was over—his War Diary—and above all before launching into what is really the sequel of this and all his previous experiences, the series of novels that began to appear in 1921, just a few words about the waifs and strays he never ceased putting forth since his Cambridge days. They can neither be classified nor correctly dated, but an approximate list of the most interesting would be:

Immoral Stories for Children (Cambridge A B C, 1894), *Countless Ballads, Parodies, Triolets and Litanies* contributed to the *Cambridge A B C*, to an equally ephemeral journal started by Baring and his optimistic friends called *Northcourt Nonsense*, and to journals with rather stronger roots, such as the *Eye-Witness*. [O! that these Trivia could be collected and made available!]

Various Articles, two of which, written in the 'nineties, were ordered by the Encyclopædia Britannica. Many have been republished in one or other of his three volumes of *Collected Essays*.

Hildesheim: four pastiches in the manner of four celebrated French Authors (1899).

Forget-me-Not and Lily of the Valley (written 1905, published 1909).

The Glass Mender and Other Stories (for children; 1910).

Translations, Ancient and Modern, with Originals.

Algæ, Series I and II.

The earliest published work of Baring's to which one would wish to draw attention is the startling contribution to the

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literature of the young entitled *Immoral Stories for Children*. The reader has been told that Baring was always a great child-lover and that the eyes of his friends and relations would fill with tears when they spoke of his miraculous power of keeping their offspring quiet and as good as gold by the hour together. The following two, from the series of *Immoral Stories*, will give an idea of his methods, and explain why in his early youth he moved about the world trailing a comet's tail of children.

The Spotless Surplice

ONCE upon a time a fairy brought two little girls to a muddy garden and to each of them she gave a spotless surplice. She told them to play and enjoy themselves, but on no account to dirty their surplices; for she said that she would come back some day and expect to find them clean. As soon as she went away, one of the little girls rolled herself in the mud and made her surplice as dirty as possible; then she began to play and make mud-pies and enjoyed herself immensely. But the other little girl tried with all her might to keep her surplice clean, and this quite prevented her enjoying herself and spoilt her play altogether, and after a time she grew tired and very cross; but the other little girl never stopped enjoying herself.

One day when the fairy came back she found that neither of the surplices was clean; one of them was quite black and the other one was rather spotty. So she whipped both the little girls soundly.

The Two Fags

ONCE upon a time there were two fags at a public school, and one day their fag-master had some friends to tea. Each of the fags was given six eggs to make buttered eggs with. One of the fags buttered them beautifully; but the other fag let the ashes get into them and burnt them dreadfully. The fag-master was very angry with him and told him that if he spoilt anything again he would cane him; but the next time he had some friends to tea, he gave all the eggs to the careful fag to butter, and told the careless fag to fetch the salt from the cupboard.

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In 1905 he struck a very different note with an exquisite story for children which appeared in the *Morning Post*, called *Forget-me-Not and Lily of the Valley*. Written for the children of a friend, it was not published in book form until 1909, by which time he had found what seemed unfindable—the right person to illustrate it. This is what he says about it in the Preface: “When the person began to make these pictures she did not know how to draw, but she asked the Fairies to help her. They did, and the result is these beautiful pictures.” The artist was indicated by the letters S. B. only, but everyone knew it was Countess Sophie Benckendorff, and it is quite true that up to that moment she had been unaware of this latent illustrative gift.

Even as some readers pay no heed to columns in their newspaper that draw financially curious eyes like a magnet, so do elderly celibates like the present writer lose sight of what is happening in the world of “Books for Children.” But as regards the vogue of this little story, and of a volume of others like it (*The Glass Mender*, published in 1910, in which *Forget-me-Not* was subsequently included, but of course without the enchanting illustrations), the following two episodes shall be related.

Writing only the other day on business to a German acquaintance, who I knew was exceedingly literary, I asked him if he had come across any of Baring’s books? The reply made me ashamed of having put the question. He knew almost everything Baring had ever written, but *Forget-me-Not and Lily of the Valley* had only come into his hands that very week. “Held by the beauty of the story” (he wrote), “and the fascination of the illustrations, I read on and on into the night, transported as by magic into the days of my childhood when my mother used to read *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* to us. The way in which Baring has re-created this world is a thing I should not have believed possible.”

And then, in his enthusiasm, the writer related how he had read it to the eight-year-old, half-Russian child of a friend, translating into German as he went along, while the child, seated on

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his knee, identified with growing excitement the *dramatis persona*—all flowers, of course—and their adventures at the ball. Finally with shining eyes and grave conviction she said: "That is the loveliest story I ever read . . . and the pictures! ! !"

Re-reading it myself recently, I realised that thirty years ago its unique character had half-escaped me. As for *The Glass Mender*, I confess to never having read those stories at all, either when they appeared in the *Morning Post* or when they were issued as a book. Fancy not getting to know "The Brass Ring" and "The Minstrel" until the eleventh hour! But perhaps the approach of second childhood tends to increased appreciation of literature for children! Anyhow, thinking of the sickeningly sentimental, sham-innocent stuff in this line which we sometimes come across in newspapers; having also lit on a few torn old Grimm pages in the tea-room of a country inn last autumn, I agree with Baring's admirer, that it is almost like a miracle when you meet with a writer—Selma Lagerlöf is, of course, another—who leads us back again into that early-morning world without brushing the dew off the grass. Yet it is a strange fact . . . not on second thoughts perhaps not so strange! . . . that this indirect descendant of the brothers Grimm is far less known and appreciated in the Germany of to-day than in France.

The other episode connected with these stories, proving that two parallel lines do sometimes meet though they take their time about it, was told me recently by someone I met that day for the first time.

This lady, a Frenchwoman, had read *Forget-me-Not* when first it came out, was enchanted by it, forgot the name of the author (which conveyed nothing to her) and spent years vainly trying to trace the little book. This although, some ten years later, she got to know Baring quite well, and had even stayed in the same house with him. Suddenly, last autumn, when she was having tea with a relation in Paris, the seventeen-years-old daughter of a friend of Baring's who was present happened to say that *Forget-me-Not* had been her favourite book as a child, and that it was by Baring. The French lady couldn't get over it and at once wrote to him.

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Since then I have found out that these stories, which played a tremendous part in the lives of his nieces and their friends, are now devoured by *their* children and these children's children—facts about which, thanks to geographical and other vagaries of life, the present writer knew nothing! But from Baring's publisher I learn that these stories have vogue abroad and have won him hosts of unknown friends. They were written for children, and, as was said before, children are the best judges. But I hope it is permitted to their elders to peep into that world and cherish a hope that they are not utterly unworthy!

In an early chapter it was stated that in 1899 Baring published imitations of four celebrated French authors in a booklet entitled *Hildesheim*; also that Henri de Régnier and other French authorities had difficulty in believing that the author was not a Frenchman, and further maintained that anyone of the four would have no objection to sign the pages ascribed to him as original work. For the sake of symmetry I repeat this information again here, with apologies.

The history of *Translations, Ancient and Modern*—reissued in 1925 with "originals," and which contains some of Baring's most beautiful work—is curious. During the war he wrote and in 1916 published a tiny paper book entitled *Translations found in a Commonplace Book*, edited by S. C., who professed himself "unable to trace the originals, even in the rare cases where the author states the language from which the translations were made." Even if Baring had not sent me this little book I think I should have guessed that not only were the contents by him, but that the title page was a Baring mystification, and that no "originals" existed. According to the Preface of this later edition, many took the title for Gospel, and wondered where these "originals" could be found. It was a delightful and still more Baringsque idea to get his friend Father Knox to furnish classic "originals" for some of these prose-poems, to invite various distinguished foreign authors to do the same by others in their own language, and reissue the collection in 1925 under the title

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Translations Ancient and Modern (with Originals). Judging by such of the "originals" as readers with limited linguistic powers can enjoy, this little volume must be as satisfying as it is unique.

A French translation of the first "S. C." edition was issued in Paris in March 1918, long before the future creators of these "originals" had been pressed into the service; and the name chosen for it was *Carnet de guerre d'un Officier d'État-major*, which exactly describes it; for the contents were written at spare moments during the campaign—as anyone who reads No. XXII, and thinks of the retreat of those terrible early days of the war, would surely guess. What an indelible picture one sad little scene stamps on the brain! . . . the old woman sitting alone in her prosperous garden, taking a last look at the ripe, carefully netted cherries and the laden pear-trees, while her family are upstairs, packing their goods for departure. "For the barbarians are not ten miles off—stealing, destroying, pillaging, burning, killing—and it is time to go, so they say. But she does not believe them; a housewife, she thinks, should stay in the house to the end; and while yielding to her timid kinsfolk, despising them in her heart she laughs to herself—a mirthless laugh." (*Sèvres, September 2, 1914.*)

Another picture that will never leave us is this:

"In front of the cool colonnade there is a little lake where the broad-winged ducks swim. The veteran watches them and throws them bread. In the thicket a nightingale is singing.

"The veteran awaits the news of the battle he has planned carefully, and which even now, and not far away, is being lost and won. The fate of the city, his fate, and the fate of all he holds dear depend on the issue; in the meantime he feeds the birds and watches the goldfish that gleam in the water." (*Cassel, May 11, 1915.*)

I think I know what General he had in mind, but one would not ask. A name would spoil the lofty, heart-shaking impersonality of this vision.

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But finest of all is No. XIX—surely as beautiful as any of the Greek epigrams that served the poet as model. Incidentally I rather wonder why Father Knox has translated it into Latin rather than Greek, yet my wonder is a humble, faint-voiced wonder, for I know he knows best!

"I, middle-aged and timid, was employed in the service of the State, sorting letters and despatching them. Yet when the trumpet sounded they gave me a sword and a shield, and sent me to fight the barbarians. Now I am lying on the straw in an alien barn, and one of the barbarians whom I was sent to fight is giving me water from a cup and speaking to me in my own tongue of the city I loved—the little city by the river which I shall see no more."
(*Fère-en-Tardenois, September, 1914.*)

Then there are two little paper-bound volumes put forth by Messrs. Heinemann in 1928 called *Algæ*—ideal bedside books. "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve," said someone, I think d'Annunzio; and who cares whether Baring invented or adopted the idea—evidently a lineal descendant of the *Gepäck* habit—of placing one, two, or three exquisite lines of prose or verse on the very top of an otherwise blank page? I ventured to say above that this method mysteriously recalls—to me at least—the passage of a meteor across a not too brilliantly star-lit sky, and of course in his last book, *Have You Anything to Declare?* such solitary gems glitter again and again, as in *Algæ*, without commentary; after saying which, one would like to add that the commentaries are an essential and deeply interesting part of the other book. There both methods are employed, but Baring is not a one-method man in anything. Meanwhile *Algæ* possesses the qualities that in certain moods—and, say, about 11.30 p.m.—are exactly adapted to a recumbent position. Light to hold and beautifully printed, you drop off with your finger still hooked in the little finger of one of the Muses, and exquisite echoes will haunt your sleep.

* * * * *

To wind up the waifs and strays list, one might mention, in

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“also ran” style, *The Danrozel Blanche*, written when he was 16; *Palamon and Arcite*, a puppet Play (1913); a masterly short account of *French Literature* (Benn Series); *A Life of Sarah Bernhardt* (Peter Davies); and a translation of *The Last Days at Tsarskoe Selo*, written by Count Paul Benckendorff, brother of the Ambassador, who was Grand Marshal at the Court of the ill-fated Czar and Czarina. Once more I repeat that this is a very inadequate account of the largess scattered right and left by a writer whose pockets, as Mr. Desmond MacCarthy said, were never empty. But one mentions all one can think of, if only to give some idea of the immense tract of ground covered by this amazingly diverse author during the last four decades.

LETTER SECTION I

LETTERS FROM M. B. TO ETHEL SMYTH — CORRESPONDENCE
BETWEEN M. B. AND VERNON LEE — LETTERS FROM HENRY
BREWSTER TO M. B.

NOTE BY E. S.

THIS Section is drawn up on the following principle. First of all I give letters or portions of letters addressed to me by Maurice Baring up to the year of the war. Alas! scores of them have disappeared, either because they were too badly written to keep, or scrawled on paper too vile to stand the wear and tear of time.

One who enjoys writing and receiving letters has, I think, a right to feel aggrieved at bad penmanship and haphazard choice of stationery in a cherished correspondent. Apart from hoarding certain communications as masterpieces of epistolary literature, you keep others as a sort of telescope wherewith to sweep the scenes of your past travels and relive your life. But if the lenses are too dirt-encrusted—too hopelessly scratched or cracked, how can this be done? Meanwhile the complainant is only too happy to produce here, in pleasure-giving shape, such fragments of a very delightful correspondence as are suitable for publication, and have survived not only twenty-five years of coal fires, but the maws of an equivalent number of waste-paper baskets.

Then I mean to give letters from two friends of Baring's dealing with certain works that appeared prior to 1914 and have been discussed in these pages, particularly the Poetic Dramas. It is inevitable and quite in order that one who is making a study of a man's work should have opinions of his own. But suppose you find yourself in conflict with the views of a man like Henry Brewster, whose judgment—say in the field of poetry—you rate higher than your own, and to whose opinion you know Baring attached great worth. What then?

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My answer is, that if anyone should think poorly of anything I greatly admire, it would not weigh with me one feather. There is an affirmative quality about admiration that will not be gainsaid. But if such a one is hot where you are lukewarm, you say to yourself: "Perhaps my hanging back is a matter of individual nerves." If so it cannot be helped, but you feel impelled to call attention to eminent authorities who are of another mind to yourself.

For instance, in the Poetic Dramas I have confessed to finding something suggestive of lack of control—a feeling his prose writing never gives you; in short, the diction always seemed to me overlaid and sometimes cloying. But if you lack sympathy for that particular form of art—drama which lends itself rather to reading than acting—perhaps your judgment is jaundiced to start with? Anyhow, as the reader will see in a final Letter Section later on, no such complaints are levelled against Baring the poet by T. E. Shaw (Lawrence of Arabia); nor, except once, in rather a half-hearted manner, by Vernon Lee.

LETTERS FROM M. B. TO ETHEL SMYTH

(1900—1914)

Paris.

Jan. 5 or 4 or 6, 1900.

. . . I wish we were all born Roman Catholics. I believe in their spirit and refuse to acknowledge the Exclusive Supremacy of their Church: just as I am an Anti-Dreyfusard, and refuse to acknowledge—and should refuse on a rack—the guilt, or even probable guilt, of the Captain. I should be a R.C. if (1) I believed in Xtianity, (2) if I believed in the Roman Catholic Church. I have bought *L' Ave Maria de l' Enfant* and I play it "dans mes heures moroses."

(Pause in the letter in which my trousers lit by a cigarette and in flames, are put out. . . .)

I am so delighted you are working *at last*. What is it about; the *Forest*? Have you read Ibsen's new play: *riveting*; very symbolic

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and attenuated; it gives one an Ethel* but one doesn't mind: it affects me like music: or an inarticulate language I understand: I read it last night.

Also have you read a book called *Sunningwell*, by Cornish? There is a chapter on music, i.e. on organ playing (don't snort) I think excessively beautiful. It made me cry. I don't care if you say it's wrong or not: no more than you cared if the betting was right or wrong in *Esther Waters*. All I know is that it is beautiful and that's enough; Hein?

Do you admire Déroulède or not? He is sincere but he exaggerates the importance of his personality. He has the wish to be a great man and he shows his love of great men: this is different from being one, and unfortunately he thinks he is a greater man than God intended him to be. As for the War† I agree with every word you say. It makes me tremble to open the newspapers here: but I was never half so proud of being an Englishman before, or of my country. I don't think we shall take a back seat for five minutes, and in five years we shall have a glorious Army. Our defeats would have thrown France into revolution, Germany into socialism, Russia in bankruptcy, Italy into all three. In England it just stiffens everybody's back, and no word of recrimination is uttered.

Must stop this.

Yours M.

(*Apropos of what Baring says he feels about the Dreyfus case, I once saw an interesting letter to him from Andrew Lang. He says—or words to that effect—that people like him and Baring who hate both vivisection and anti-vivisectionists; who believe Dreyfus is innocent, yet loathe Dreyfusards—though perhaps, he allowed, Anti-Dreyfusards were worse, really—“have no business on this planet.”*)

April 1, 1901.

. . . I tremendously agree with you in what you say about Wagner meaning what he was doing. There is a sentence of Shelley's which illustrates the other thing: "A man cannot say I will compose poetry. The greatest poet cannot even say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory bright-

* A family expression, used to signify momentary denseness.

† The Boer War.

LETTER SECTION I

ness. This power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could the influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the *most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet. . . .*"

Copenhagen,
April 6th 01.

. . . I read out to Countess Benck* the last chorus in Shelley's *Hellas*, "The World's great age begins anew," which is full of classical allusions. I thought she would have Ethels all the time and would be bored, and I read it listlessly without thinking of it all; and when it was over she said she thought it was one of the finest poems in the world, which is exactly what I think. It has the supreme features of simplicity, like Paestum. What is funny is she can't bear Swinburne. She thinks Swinburne is all words and the rhythm gets on her nerves. Of course she is right in thinking the Shelley Chorus far finer than Swinburne's choruses: and of course if Swinburne's rhythm gets on your nerves there is nothing left: on the whole I think it is a sign of supreme taste to dislike Swinburne. I mean it is exactly the same thing, *I am convinced*, as disliking Wagner. As I told you a long time ago, I admire Swinburne inordinately, his *Atalanta in Calydon* and about twenty of *Poems and Ballads*. But I think that in spite of his manifest genius, compared to Shelley and Keats and Shakespeare he is a poet of *leit motius*; and here again *you see he says all he has to say*, and Countess Benck sees, like you see in Wagner, *how it is done* and consequently it leaves her cold. It happens to sweep me away although I think one sees the trick; but the trick is one of genius just as Wagner's is—only I do prefer the other, which is what you call the "preordained chance of Nature. . . ."

April 25, 1901.

. . . Shakespeare was born last Tuesday and Arthur Benson yesterday. I wonder what Arthur Benson would have been in

* Benck, or B, always stands for Benckendorff.

MAURICE BARING

Elizabethan times: the Renaissance would have hissed and seethed round him and left him like a rock unscathed in the sea, don't you think? As for Shakespcare, if he had been born in the 70ties he would not I think have been very different from what he was; he would have taken stones and turned them into bread, taken two loaves and turned them into five thousand, taken water and changed it into wine, with the same royal carelessness. . . .

Dec. 18, 1901.

Your deeply interesting letters have just come, and the Sappho for which I thank you with all my heart. Among other wonderful things don't you think the three lines about the apple,

"As the sweet apple, etc.," one of the most absolutely exquisite things in poetry, if not the three most exquisitely beautiful lines in the world? I agree with all you say about Anactoria, and you say all there is to say. No it's not really artificial and your comparison to *Tristan* is excellent. But I think the whole of Swinburne may be aptly compared to *Tristan*, except *Atalanta in Calydon*. Have you read this yet? It is to me incomparably his finest work—the choruses, the speeches, the last chorus and speech. Do write and tell me what you think about it. In *Poems and Ballads* don't you like the *Ballad of Burdens*? I think it a noble poem, and for sheer passion *In the Orchard*, ("O God, O God, that day should come so soon——") and for loveliness *The Sundew*, and restraint the lines in *Memory of Landor*, and *Faustine*. In *Félice* there are some wonderful stanzas:

"If you were I and I were you
How could I love you, say?"
etc.

Copenhagen,

December 21st, 1901.

. . . I have re-read *Anastoria* to see whether I agree with myself and with you. I do in the main, but I still think there is *too much* at the beginning; the intolerable strain on the imagination could have been every inch as adequately rendered without quite so much fang, foam, wine, spit, bite, beast, breast, froth: there are some lines I think simply jar as *fautes de goût*. I don't mind a scrap about the subject; I should think it an artistic excess

LETTER SECTION I

of expression if it was about a Man and Woman celebrating their Silver Wedding, since the excess of bite, beast, breast, makes one think of *expansion*, i.e. of some short original being expanded as no such over-riot could be in Greek. The whole range of the passion, the strain, would be there, only expressed in a closer utterance. This only alludes to the passage before the mystery of the cruelty of things; from there onward I think the poem opens its wings and soars into the highest heaven. . . .

. . . In *Songs Before Sunrise* the *Prelude* is a glorious thing, and the end of a poem called *Mater Triumphalis*, from the lines beginning "I do not bid thee spare me, dreadful, O dreadful Mother." I don't know what it means: but it lifts me out of my shoes. Countess B. said it was one of the things she would like said to her while she was dying. The same volume: *Super Flumina Babylonis* I think *sublime*, and in my opinion his highest note; some of the stanzas in *Before a Crucifix* too. I think the poem I personally like best of all is the *Triumph of Time* in 1st Series of *Poems and Ballads*—the way the last line of every stanza falls on one. . . .

I don't know if you have as I have along with an unreasonable culte for Swinburne a wave of violent hate for Browning. There are absolutely only three poems of Browning I can read with any pleasure at all. I loathe his dentist's optimism, his cheery self-satisfaction, his pride which is so different from the pride of Landor: "I strove with none, for none was worth my strife." And above all his hideous jargon.

So glad you are coming so soon. I am longing to see the Sargent picture. Do bring photographs of it with you. . . .

23. Dec. 1901.

. . . In *Anactoria* I hate the whole of that page 68. The minute *blood* is mentioned heavy disgust sets in for me, because I think there is a twinge of *Sadisme* in it; that is a thing which sets my whole being on edge, and I simply can't bear a puff of it in a very beautiful thing like *Anactoria*. Perhaps you will think this a silly prejudice. The truth is that Swinburne, among great poets, is *un assimilateur* and not *un créateur* (assimilation in the best sense: not a plagiarist or a *moyen* of mere echoes). But Shelley is a creator; hence the difference.

Yours M.

MAURICE BARING

December 28th, 1901.

. . . Where Swinburne seems to me to come really close to *Sappho* is in *Sapphics*. Here, with a certain expansion, and to me the exactly right degree of expansion, he renders the very spirit and an echo of the sound; the poem seems to me simply different in degree from Sappho's work: whereas *Anactoria* seems to me different in kind. This is more or less what I have been struggling to say all along. . . .

Rome.

January 30th, 1902.

. . . I arrived here Tuesday morning spending a day at Florence with Countess Benck. We had luncheon with Vernon who was too splendid, very amusing and in her best form; quite delightful and charming. C. B. admired and liked her enormously.

Well, the beauty of Rome entered into me like a poisoned arrow the first afternoon; I went to St. Peters, the Coliseum, the Pincio and the Protestant cemetery, and the delicious poison ran through my veins and the eternal charm sank deep. I was not disappointed for one second.

Tuesday night there was a Ball here; Brewster was there and I was very glad to see him. The Curries have been kindness itself but she has got a shocking cold. Yesterday I went to tea with Mary Crawshay; a woman sang, but you know it is no vain compliment when I say that your singing disgusts me of all other throat production, and I believe if Jenny Lind rose from the grave I should turn a deaf ear to her. Although I know this is a bad instance, because her singing was, I'm sure, in the same category as yours. Well, at Mary Crawshay's there were several people that interested me, a charming Russian woman, I think Sazanoff is her name, a Princesse Bariatinsky—I think a friend of yours—a Madame Kühn who I had long wished to see, etc. Last night I dined with Rennell Rodd and the head of the American School of Archaeology; how these archaeologists hate one another! But we had a very pleasant dinner and sat talking till one a.m. To-day I had luncheon with H.B.* the guests being Rodd, Mme. Pasolini, Bagot (right spelling? I mean the nets and fishes), and another man. I think H.B.'s apartment is perfection . . . the double staircases! After luncheon I drove with Mary Crawshay along the Appian Way. Oh! the Campagna! It

* Henry Brewster.

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was a grey day with a slight silver fringe on the tops of the blue hills, and in the desolate majesty of the plain a boy, dressed like a real shepherd, played on a pipe like Kurneval in *Tristan*. I shall never forget it. Do you remember an essay of Vernon's where she speaks of the particular twinge which you feel when you say: 'this is Italy'? I said '*this* is Rome.' Lady Currie, the little I have seen of her, has been most amusing and delightful; I gave her all your messages. . . .

What you say about Donald* interests and pleases me very much. I feel the same thing and more. I feel the same thing about his *intellect* which strikes me as *tremendous* in the same way as Vernon's; when I am with him I feel as if I was a Madame Tussaud production and ought to be shoved in a lumber room. I have an absolutely unlimited admiration for his intellect and his genius.

I daresay he hasn't "found himself" in the way of composition yet; perhaps he isn't destined to be a composer. But I don't think one can tell yet (like your Brahms story about yearlings. Do you know what I mean)?†

March 1, 1902.

. . . I have heard many scholars object to *Atalanta* as not being Greek, but surely, as you said, it makes our heart beat with Greece more than the most faultless pastiche. Now what I want to come to, where I want your opinion, is here; and please give it me, as it will have a great influence on my future plans. Do you think in the *Black Prince* I have absolutely failed to give the reader any sensation of abstract Black-Prince-ness? I remember when you read it you said there was a *certain Westminster Abbey quality*, which Arthur Benson and Benckendorff both found too: if you really think this, all is well, and I hold you are a 400th times better judge of this particular thing—this sensation, this impression which I was aiming at, which I tried to give—than Vernon; because I did not *attempt* to give the true atmosphere of the epoch; to make the people what they must have really been like: I only tried to make them like what, in the lumber room of our brains, is lit by a kind of fitful ray of sunshine when we say the words "Black Prince," or see his tomb in Canterbury, or think about him in Westminster. And

* Donald Tovey.

† Brahms once said he had given up judging a pupil's future by his early work.

MAURICE BARING

if I have succeeded in doing this to *you*—whom I consider much the best judge one could have of this particular *English* "Empfindung," well I shall be satisfied.

To my mind the plays which are most successful as works of art, have been those in which the authors have flung local colour to the winds; the way Shakespeare and Racine did. D'Annunzio's new play which is all local colour is, H.B. says, like a lecture accompanied by photographic tableaux vivants. . . .

May 7, 1902.

. . . I read *L'Âme Païenne** with the greatest pleasure, and I want to read it again. I wish he would write another such book and in English.

Tell Grahame to write and tell me what happens at the final performance. Why shouldn't you have two choruses, one mute one on the stage; one hidden one singing behind the scenes. I tremble when I think of the Covent Garden chorus which consists of drunk organ-grinders singing Italian. . . .

Rome.

July 19, 1902. 9 a.m.

[*After a fine performance of my opera "Der Wald" at Covent Garden.*]

BELOVED E.,

I got a telegram from Grahame early this morning and telegraphed to you immediately. I am *inexpressibly* happy, and feel as if oil had been poured in the groaning machinery of the universe (just as one sometimes feels as if the devil had thrown a handful of pebbles into it).

You know that my faith in the *Wald* has been constant, unshaken, and unshakeable from the first day you played me *Heiliger Wald* on your piano at One Oak, and I knew—as Galileo knew some fact about the sun—that sooner or later it would win recognition: but it's satisfactory that it should be now, not when we are dead; and doubly satisfactory after Berlin and *all the obstacles*. In fact I think you have accomplished something as difficult as Hannibal crossing the Alps. I am so happy; hoping to see the newspapers. [I asked Grahame to *abonner* me at a Press Agency and I hope he will.] It was sad that I wasn't there (*for me*). Last night I sat watch in hand during dinner and

* H. Brewster's last book.

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when it was 9.15 in Rome, and 8.15 I suppose in London, I thought of the *Wald* beginning and nearly sobbed.

The moral is one should always live in London, because if one doesn't one misses everything. I haven't dared mention leave yet: it depends on a number of things: I may get leave in August—I may not. I won't bore you any more at this moment. This is only to remind you of what you know already, i.e. my utter *joy* at your success. I should liked to have seen Aunt M'aimée's face.* I hope someone will write me details.

Yours affec. M.

London.

1904.

. . . Tuesday I will gladly come: following message to you from Countess Benck:

"Dites-lui que je comprends qu'elle n'est pas venue dîner, qu'elle a âgé en personne pleine de raison; mais dites-lui aussi que si je meure avant qu'elle ne me chante de nouveau, elle aura des remors éternels de ne pas m'avoir une dernière fois fait sentir des choses qu'elle seule sait éveiller dans mon âme."

This last sentence, I mean the fact that your singing evolves certain things which nothing else does, applies to me also. . . .

Sosnofka,
Tambow, Morshansk,
Russia,
September, 1907.

. . . The beauty of this place is indescribable just now. The ragged woods are splashed with crimson and gold, and the plains are all brown and blue and the sky in the evening a wonderful living gold in the West, and in the East opaque, faint, pink mauve, like the petal of a hydrangea; and there is a smell of wood and smoke and autumn leaves in the sunny air that *bites* one when one goes out in the morning; and after one has been out for a few hours one feels as if one had been fed on *wind* like Pegasus for weeks and could fly over the universe; and then two minutes later one falls into a profound sleep. How I wish you were here. It's not far from Vienna and they would be delighted if you turned up. It's an easier journey from Vienna than from anywhere, via Warsaw.

* Baring's aunt, Lady Ponsonby.

MAURICE BARING

There are some people putting up electric bells in this house. Workmen in very dirty shirts but with an enormous self-conscious pride of belonging to the proletariat and not being peasants or "Bourgeois." One of them said to me: "The number of your bell is No. 6; we put it especially in your room." (So that when I ring, No. 6 appears downstairs somewhere.) I asked if there was something special about No. 6, not seeing the point. "Well," the man answered, "it might have been No. 3 or in fact any odd number, and lots of people when they see an odd number on their electric bell have it changed, especially *people who are afraid of Death!*"

I have seldom heard an *aperçu* which astonished me more. . . .

Jan. 14, 1914.
St. Petersburg,
Moika. 104.

(*About Woman Suffrage.*)

DEAREST AND MOST BELOVED E.,

I got your letter to-day, and it has been a great joy to me because it has made me understand all sorts of things, and I feel I know now there is, and can never be again, any real misunderstanding between us, and I think the reason of it all was that we saw each other very little and never talked about it at all.

It has all been my fault for not speaking out more. I didn't speak out because I hadn't made up my mind *inside*.

I see how I may be superficially influencible and influenced, but my inside *kernel* is very independent, very difficult to influence, and it takes a long time to form.

Now I wonder whether I can make you understand something else which was at the root of our misunderstanding. You would understand it in a flash if only I can express it.

I always saw the invincible logic of your cause. I always saw the $2 + 2 = 4$ part of it, I always saw the absolute lack of argument and logic on the other side, but I didn't yield to it for this reason; from not exactly a belief in, but from a wondering at the possibilities of the intense and fundamental *illogicality* of the English character and English institutions. I mean that the substance of things—ideas, institutions, etc.—seems sometimes so illogical in England, that at heart I was led to wonder—to more than wonder, to believe—that, given England, in

LETTER SECTION I

this case $2 + 2$ might = 5; that votes, instead of giving power might give the reverse; that the non-arguments were the right arguments.

It was for this G.K.C. appealed to me on the subject, because he seemed to me the only person who offered arguments which weren't arguments, whereas all those who did offer "arguments" were necessarily doomed to failure, the logic being obviously on the other side.

To go back one second to the illogicality; do you remember Mathew Arnold once writing somewhere that one could never be sure of not waking up in England to find someone writing to *The Times* to say that no reasonable man could doubt but that our system of L. s. d. and weights and measures was more simple and better in every way than the decimal system?

It is so profoundly true *still*, I think. Arthur Benson said to me once two years ago, when I was talking about W.S., "My dear Maurice, you are talking like an old retired Colonel at a Club!"; and *you* said exactly the same thing this summer, and you were both perfectly right! But I knew that, and I used to say to myself, and I said to A.C.B.—"But supposing the old Colonel is right although he can't express himself and although his arguments are absurd; supposing he *feels* more clearly than we do the instinct of the country, the national trend on this subject—just like a dog?" That is what I used to think. In fact I was convinced that it was quite possible $2 + 2$ would make 5 in England in this question, and now I don't see why it should.

Nol it is simpler than all that; I simply don't believe it would. In a word, because of a lot of reasons, very likely absurd but which were the necessary workings and movings of my mind, I was *anti*, and now I am *pro*. And that's all there is to be said, and one of the things which has led to this, which has made my kernel form, has been a fresh dose of Russia, which I hadn't had for some time and where there is such an utter *directness* about the handling of such questions, such an absence of convention, "stage-properties," catch-words, shibboleths, such a constant pricking of bubbles. It acts on me like a keener air, and two minutes conversation with a certain niece of Countess Benck's made me look at the whole thing in another light and from an opposite pole. There is one matter of terrific importance on the anti side and that is the anti-ness of English *women* who are against. Yes, they are the real adversaries, and I think they are

MAURICE BARING

very strong both in their inertia when inert, and their violence when violent; and most of all in their bitter conventionalism (you know the self-sufficient *protestant* well-to-do critical woman). Oh! dear! We will talk about all that some day.

I went to hear *Parsifal* the other day, an odd experience after fifteen years. They acted it so much more simply than at Bayreuth, without any of the flummery and the *poses plastiques*, and it made a great difference; so that in Act I one felt that Gurnemanz, that old bore, was really telling a story, just like I might tell you a story. But the *slowness*, the feeling of being on another planet where one would be heavier, and where it would be three times as difficult to move or breathe, struck me more than ever. The *stationiness* of it, the absence of anything dynamic, kinetic—in fact dramatic. I think Wagner is never dramatic but splendidly *scenic* at moments; and then the beginning of Act III impressed me as much as ever, with its feeling of many years having gone by, and the spring having gone and come, and gone and come, and being there again; and its being Good Friday *again*—not last year's Good Friday. And again I was struck by the utter unreligious character of most of the music, with the exception of the Dresden Amen which positively clashes, to my mind, with the rest. And, with the exception of the beginning of Act III, the feeling of a *méchant ménétrier* making sensual music—a sort of slave-dealer lolling on a divan and smoking a Hubble-Bubble or narghilli or whatever it's called. . . .

(*An undated fragment.*)

. . . I remember once asking H.B. whether he did not think, that if plays were such as could never be acted, they were not a satisfactory form of literature? His reply was: "It is the form I like best. I like the absence of comment and description, and getting the truth straight from the horse's mouth of the characters, without the intervention of the author."

What to me was surprising, important, and memorable, was not his liking my poetic dramas, but his liking them as much as he did—enough to read and re-read them several years after they were first printed. . . .

In answer to your query, he, Countess Benck, and Benck liked the last scene of the *Black Prince* better than anything I wrote before or after. So, I think, did George Curzon. . . .

LETTER SECTION I

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN VERNON LEE AND M. B.

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

*Il Palmerino,
Maiano, Florence.
Jan. 16, 1902.*

There seems great difficulty about getting my little play* printed unless I accept to sandwich it between other stories. But if ever it gets printed, I shall send it you. Your aunt and Ethel put me in great conceit with it, and I have really taken to contemplating it with a kind of awe, wondering how I ever came to produce anything so unlikely. . . .

Good-bye and all good luck to you; and may Italy prove less inaccessible than you think.

Yours sincerely,
V. PAGET.

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

*British Embassy,
Rome.
2 August, 1902.*

MY DEAR SIMPATTESSIMA MISS PAGET,

It was a very great pleasure to get your letter which brought the smells of a forest, a German Wald on an Italian hill, to Rome. I like letters written with a stylograph; they are easy to read and have something monkish in the way they form letters, which shows that modern inventions if they go far enough produce ancient results. I think I am writing nonsense: but I have got a cold in my head like one used to have in the nursery; and nursery cures—nitre and sal volatile—only seem to exasperate it. . . .

You know in the *Small Gepäck* there is very little Swinburne: only a few stanzas. In *Das Grosse Gepäck* the object was to have as *much* of one author as you could possibly want. So as not to say: "I wish I could show you this poem only it is in Swinburne's 30th volume." But the fact remains that I prefer Swinburne to Browning, Rossetti, and many other others; and in making

*Ariadne in Mantua

MAURICE BARING

Gepäcks you must have what Countess Benckendorff calls no "respect humain" and only suit your taste.

I seek no intellectual or very little intellectual pleasure in poetry; I like there to be some "fundamental brainwork," but in Browning there seems to me, with the exception of about a dozen lyrics, one or two passages of blank verse, and single lines scattered all through his work, fundamental brainwork and nothing else. What I want is the *Muses Madness*, and, short of actual frenzy, strong emotion—so strong that it bursts into song and changes the words into gold, and adds a fourth indefinable dimension; "not a third sound but a star." I wish poetry to affect me as music does, only to be articulate; I don't care twopence for chiselled masterpieces of form, for exquisite impeccability; Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, and Richépin leave me cold; they amuse but do not ravish me.

Musset with all his faults carries me away. I don't mind the "longueurs" and the lapses, the twigs in the current as long as the river is there; full, swirling, seething, coming from some mysterious mountain, going to some undiscovered sea. Well, with Swinburne I am convinced that in the work of his best early period you are face to face with such a river; in *Atalanta*, and poems like *The Triumph of Time*. I think he is inferior to Shelley, Keats, Milton, Heine, Leopardi, in the same way as Wagner is inferior to Schubert and Schumann and Bach and Mozart. . . .

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Florence.

Nov. 13, 1902.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

The little prayer in *Ariadne* runs as follows: "Mother of God—We are thy weary children;—Teach us, Thou weeping Mother,—to cry ourselves to sleep"— . . .

I wish I could believe I had been of any use about your play. Mine is at a standstill. I simply can't get a publisher. This is a fine answer to Ethel and those of my friends who reproach me for giving up my time to psychology instead of writing fiction. Why, here's a volume of fiction, far the best I shall ever write, and not a dog to print it!

My long stay with my French friend has greatly cheered me. How odd it is that people should compensate one for unsuccess, for everything. . . .

LETTER SECTION I

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

Rome.

29 Nov., 1902.

DEAR MISS PAGET, DEAR AND DELIGHTFUL MISS PAGET,—

It was kind of you, really extremely kind, to read that tiresome old *Black Prince* again and to write to me about it. Please don't think I disagree with you about Parnassianism. I abound in your sense. I have screamed myself hoarse in preaching and proclaiming what you say about the fundamental imperative interest that must be underneath. But what surprises me is your severity (not in my case but in general) on the *faults* which are the necessary and inevitable outcome of this very quality. When that quality exists I can forgive all faults of "*forme*." They seem to me infinitely insignificant compared with the *gain*. But you are severe. I am sure for instance you do not admit *Byron* in your Parnassus. I do, and give him a place of honour, just because he seems to me, in *Don Juan* and many other things, to possess this heaving surge and ebb and flow. . . .

As to my work, of course if I were writing the *Black Prince* now there would probably be no metaphors and no long speeches; probably too the small merit it has would not be there also. It came like that with its faults, and I was conscious in revising that it was no use pruning too much, because the faults were inherent to the whole structure and conception, and that the only thing to do was either to leave it, removing the grosser blunders, or to "hatch it again and hatch it different"; and I preferred to leave it and go on to something else. I have written two plays since *Gaston*. Both are much soberer and simpler I think.

Aren't you rather inclined—forgive the impertinence—to over-rate the application of the *Russian Blacking Machine*? I was re-reading your book on the Eighteenth Century in Italy. I feel you would now wish to black a great part of it. I am convinced it would be a mistake to *cancel one word*. You would with the bricks pull out the enchanting moss and flowers, and all the charm. The charm is there; I don't care tuppence if the wall is straggly, or how it is built, or if it has unnecessary ornaments or gables or porticoes. I revelled in it, reading it from start to finish, and found nothing to skip. I finished it with a prayer

MAURICE BARING

of thanks to you as a wonderful wizard, an enchanter who by subtle spells invokes the magic and mysterious past.

Yours M. B.,

And once more thank you.

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

Sosnofka,

October 14, 1903.

. . . I sent Countess Benckendorff your *Ariadne* as soon as it was published, and she and her husband both read it with delight and admiration; she thought it in the highest degree poignant and beautiful. I can only implore you to give us more of the same kind.

What you say about impatience at the charming idle people who cultivate feeble tastes interests me and stirs up many dormant thoughts. I do *not* share your impatience for reasons which I will try to explain.

Firstly it seems to me it is the very existence of such people that enables the thorough and industrious class to work and exist at all.

Renan says somewhere, in his *Dialogues Philosophiques* I think, that if there were not a multitude of people going to the Auteuil races he would not be sitting in his *cabinet de travail* at work; that 10,000 idle people are necessary in order that one savant may work. (Do look out the passage.) By eliminating these idlers it seems to me you would disturb the economy of nature and bring the fabric of things crashing down on our heads.

Secondly Renan says somewhere else in reference to Petronius Arbiter: "*n'est pas Roi de la Mode qui veut*," and that the world would lose if it were composed merely of *des lourdauds pédants* and some other delightful expression. I think that the existence of merely frivolous people who are bent on amusement is a necessary element in this grey world, and that Helen of Troy, Mary Stuart, Ninon de l'Enclos, Diane de Poitiers, Petronius Arbiter, and Charles II are equally necessary in the scheme of things as St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas, Marcus Aurelius, John Knox, Pym, and Lady Jane Grey, whom we appreciate all the more by reason of contrast.

Again I think there is a great deal of injustice, inspired often by envy which it is irritating to contemplate, against what is

LETTER SECTION I

contemptuously termed "*les gens du monde*," who, besides having given us our most remarkable statesmen and rulers, have also produced Catullus, Dante, Bacon, Montaigne, Ronsard, Sir Philip Sydney, Shelley, Pushkin, Tolstoi, and Tourgeneff. Their frivolity, their selfishness, their extravagance, etc., are always spoken of; their qualities are taken for granted, and the charm of their qualities is that they were matters of course to them themselves; things which they did naturally and thought no more of than of being decently clothed; and these qualities have a great attraction when they are tested in the crucible of tragic events, such as the French revolution, and they produce the gold of heroism. Heroism too of, to me, *a particularly attractive kind*—"the unselfishness of the selfish, the unworldliness of the worldly" suddenly manifest without fuss, cant or pretension. I like the account of Biron's death in the French Revolution, I like the manifestation of that kernel of *unflinching and uncompromising instinct which, blent with the utmost cynicism and irony*, has caused men in various epochs to go laughingly to death for a cause or a creed *in which they did not believe*. Again I have personally noticed this, that the idle frivolous class regard the other laborious one with *respect* and accept their censure with indifference; whereas the laborious often regard the frivolous with outward contempt mingled with an *inward gnawing and bankering* envy. We know the frequent combination of the socialist and the snob.

Do not misunderstand me or think I am either blind to what is hollow and sham in "social" (hateful word) life, or to what is great and noble in the lives of those who renounce it and all its works. All I say is that tolerance is necessary on both sides; the frivolous have qualities and the strenuous and sober have faults which should suffice to prevent them from continually seeking for the moles in the eyes of others.

There is another point of which you were possibly thinking. It is sometimes very irritating—to the strenuous—when the frivolous arrogate to themselves authority in a province which does not belong to them.

Sarcey said about the "public des Mardis" at the Théâtre Français: "Ils viennent pour voir et se faire voir; c'est bien. *Mais la pièce, est-ce que cela les regarde?*" But here again do we not all, *tous, tant que nous sommes*, prefer the favourable judgement of such people, if sincere, to that of the professional critics and *gens de métier*? Would you not rather that Countess Rasponi was thrilled

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by a work of yours than that Sidney Colvin approved it? And are their judgements always so bad and so ignorant?

The critics ignored Shelley; the *gens du monde* discovered him. I know the reverse of the medal (you need not mention it), the intellectual snobberies, pretensions, and ignorance, fashion, etc. I only say it is *good that they should exist*; they have their function and it is not so narrow as is generally conceived. Look at the judgement of the professional painters on Whistler at the time of the Ruskin trial; the ignorant amateurs were wiser.

Personally the opinion I most respect and most care for is that of "*des honnêtes gens*" who are neither specialists nor workers, who live away from cliques and coteries and have no other motive than the desire of expressing their likes and dislikes; and if they are intelligent I think their criticism is the best which is to be got.

Forgive this long harangue. . . .

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Florence.

Venice, Oct. 30, 1903.

I am not by any means sure of my impression of your plays; I think that they require quicker reading, and less scrappy, properly. This much I see, that you have very remarkable poetical power, and that it has undergone a process of refining, of weeding and pruning, since the *Black Prince*. The progress is really great, and the value of your singular metaphorical, almost lyrical gift is tenfold since you have taught yourself to restrain it.

Gaston seems to me far away the best of the three plays, though there are very fine things in *Tristram*. I don't care much for *Dusk*. Perhaps it is my fault, but this sort of fantastic floral-fairy-nowhere-nobody land bores me. I can do with Maeterlinck's abstract grey cardboard-tower landscape, because it is merely negative and allows one to concentrate on the mere feeling (I am bound to say I hate Peléas and the Princesse Malline for their vagueness)—but in *Dusk* there is a decorative character about the *nowhere* which I, personally, can't do with.

Moreover, it seems to me, that in all these plays the *play* part is exceedingly weak, and, as I don't care a *button* what happens to anyone, and I am never made to feel *how* it happens, I wish the

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play or story element were left out. So far for blame, and how uncivil, dear Maurice!

But now for the good. You have, dear Maurice, a quite peculiar, great and enchanting gift: which I have met nowhere else, except, as regards one or two points, in Mrs. Woods' *Princess of Hanover*. How define it. It is the gift of the love-duet; of giving, in metaphors and lyric flights and pathetic snatches, the equivalent of the deepest unspoken feeling. It is the giving, *as music gives it*, a voice to the voiceless Faust-moment.

This constitutes the excellence of your three plays. Now, is it not possible, by patient incubation of this gift, to separate it from the (to me) quite dull, stale, and unprofitable vehicle, i.e., the common garden romantic play, in which you present it us?

How? . . . That's your look out! . . .

Your plays at present are like a Handel opera. Three or four divine airs in pages of dull recitative. *Develop the air*, let your opera become melodic throughout; disdain the business; go for the mere culminating situation. . . .

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

13th Nov., 1903.

MY DEAR MISS PAGET,—

Your letter arrived last night forwarded from Russia. The kind things you say about my plays made my heart beat with pleasure. I am also a little perplexed by your criticism. . . .

The long and short of it I suppose is this:

You like plays if they are good plays, you dislike bad plays; my plays are bad plays with patches of poetry that have pleased you, and your advice is let the patch be the whole—i.e., try and make it as full of good things and as devoid of bad things as possible. I will try. I do not expect I shall succeed, and after all one must work in one's own way, and work out one's own Salvation. . . .

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Florence.

June 6, 1905.

. . . I have read your play.* The beginning seems not up to the rest—there is not sufficient promise of the situation to come. You know it all, but to us this white wall would be the better

* *Mabasma*.

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for some tracks into the future being painted on it; at least so it strikes me. I am struck with the far greater maturity of your style; all the imagery which, despite its great beauty, used to cloy me, as you know, is now worked in as an integral element. . . .

I hear you are a bearded pard and a person who has seen many kinds of men, now. Still, I hope you will always remain the Maurice Baring who said of the Good Shepherd's lamb: "It is *not* a *sortie de bal*," and who came through Florence with his bicycle on a dust cart. . . .

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

3 Gray's Inn Place,
High Holborn.

June 9, 1905.

. . . P.S.: Goethe's best lyrics seem to me no better than Shelley's. Shelley's *The World's great age, I arise from dreams of thee* and *Swiftly walk over the western wave* seem to me unapproachable and unique. Goethe's also; but they seem to me two different things; not the same in kind; like comparing a butterfly's wing with a rose-leaf. . . .

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE

British Embassy,
St. Petersburg.

August 4, 1905.

. . . I have just been reading an article of yours in the *Westminster* on a funeral and a Greek Church. It set me thinking. I don't believe the impression you got from the Greek Church was entirely due to its being a *Greek* Church, but partly because it was a Greek Church out of its proper place in a Catholic country.

For I have got just that impression from Mass at the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Westminster, where all the pomp of Rome is mingled with all the order and tidiness of England; so much so that I don't feel as if I was in a Catholic Church. If you talk, a verger comes and tells you to be quiet, and the candles don't gutter; it is all swept and garnished. At Arundel at the R.C. Church the effect is exactly the same; there is no tawdriness, no hurry, and the shadow of protestantism is everywhere; because I suppose the form religion takes in a country depends on the

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national characteristics, and the characteristics of England are staid and protestant.

Now the impression one receives from the Greek Church in a Russian village or in the Cathedral of the Assumption, or at Moscow is totally different from what you describe as happening at Venice.

At Moscow one is struck by the extraordinary mixture of devoutness and practicalness, a kind of *Lares and Penates* Pagan quality in the worship utterly devoid of self-consciousness, and being performed in the manner in which these things *must* be done, because they have always been done like that.

The Church is crowded to begin with; every class—peasants, children, women, soldiers, generals, officials—all standing up in a crowd and every single person carrying on his particular devotions separately. For instance one man remains stolidly immovable when certain saints are mentioned, but prostrates himself at the name of others; he worships his particular favourite saint more than others.

Then sometimes quite suddenly a peasant will give way to an access of devotion and prostrate himself nine times running. And all the time the magnificent bass singing is going on. . . .

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

St. Petersburg.

Jan. 7, 1906.

MY DEAR VERNON (allow me this familiarity!),—

Although I never hear from you, every now and then I hear of what you have thought about by seeing in the newspapers a bit of you; and yesterday in the English bookshop I saw a new book of yours and bought *The Spirit of Rome*. I don't know if it's good or bad and don't care. I only know that in a curious way it brought back to me all sorts of past days; and that when I read about the river God I thought about our walk in the early spring, when the spring was like the spring in a lyric or on a Chinese white milky vase. And when I read about San Prassede* I thought of other walks and talks, and it brought back all sorts of faces and thoughts and nice ghosts, and I felt I wanted to write to you.

Do you ever have the feeling, when you write a sentence that

* St. Praxedis.

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is to be printed, of saying to yourself as you write it, "If so-and-so sees this sentence they will understand exactly what one means"? It is like writing a letter and putting it into a kind of universal post-office. Often in reading articles by you I have come across a sentence which I particularly felt and understood; not that any one of your sentences were meant for me, but it is all the better when they are not "meant" and yet find the exact response.

I am living in Moscow (address, Hotel Dresden). I should like to read what you would write about it as a place. It has no beauty really; nothing which we enjoy anywhere else; no art, nothing stimulating intellectually either in the place or the people, and yet I find it has for me an extraordinary charm. It is dirty, shabby, rather sordid, very untidy, backward, ignorant, vulgar in some parts and ostentatious; and yet . . . !

It's the people I suppose; and I suppose their charm arises from their good nature and simplicity; one can't help loving a cabman! who says to you, "I don't know what I would have done if God hadn't sent you to me last night when you drove home. I told all my friends that everybody had gone home and there was no one to drive, but God sent me a Barine—and such a Barine, who paid double the fare."

"I suppose you said God sent you a fool," I said. "O Barine," he answered, "don't *offend* God."

Write to me.

Yours M. B.
(MAURICE.)

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Palmerino.
Jan. 25, 1906.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

I cannot tell you how much pleasure your letter has given me. Mme. Bulteau used to say that I lacked one of the essentials of a writer, "*l'intuition du lecteur à l'autre bout*"—and it is certain that I can never imagine what I write being read, still less read by any one in particular. (I know all my writings tend more and more towards the soliloquy.) It gives, perhaps, a certain freedom and decency; but sometimes, not often, it makes one feel a bit lonely, as if one were the *vox clamans*—not in the desert, but inside a cupboard.

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On the other hand, ninety-nine times out of a hundred the person who speaks to one about one's books is either liking them for something one didn't mean to put in them, or is an abhorrence to oneself; and, of all clammy horrors, the horror of pleasing those who displease one!

So you can understand, dear Maurice, the very great pleasure your letter has given me. You see, what one wants is not to write *about Rome*, but to find one or two people with whom, writing or talking about it, one *feels about Rome* just like that, and not differently.

I have been wanting to write to you (but been prevented by very exhausting gouty eczema which has reduced me to semi-idiotcy) ever since reading your delightful Manchurian book. Bless you, dear Maurice, for your fine, clean, tender humanness of feeling, for your courage in being capable of horror and pity and yet no sentimentalist; and for your passionate desire for good understanding between nations. A nationality (as distinguished from a Government with custom houses and officials and all the usual patriotic lies) is such an inestimable thing for *all the other* nationalities; it means, in the domain of thought and feeling a climate and soul, hence products of different use and charm, the exchange of which is part of the give and take, making up life.

I *bate* Russia as a Power (like Germany as ditto and most others), but I am always fearfully attracted to Russians through their writers; they seem to me to be bringing some new element of goodness and depth left out of our Franco-Roman-Germanic tripos. I wish I knew Russian, and some day I want to go there.

And meanwhile, good heavens, what are you in the midst of? Your silence makes the newspaper accounts only more terrifying. Will you be kind and send me a postcard saying "I am alive"? I feel you as a very real thing in my life. . . .

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

*British Embassy,
St. Petersburg.
Jan. 31, 1906.*

. . . I have finished the *Spirit of Rome*. It took me back into past days. Rome is a place—like Algiers to you—which I enjoyed afterwards; while I was there I was unhappy and longing to go; this was partly because I loathed the Diplomatic Service

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which is a really degrading profession I think. If course I know that this is nonsense, and that *il n'y a pas de son métier*; but if one finds one is tied to a thing one doesn't like, the sooner one cuts oneself away from it the better. That is just what Americans never hesitate or fear to do. Subjects constantly crop up on which I should like your opinion. . . .

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Florence.

April 5, 1906.

. . . People nowadays write so well, when they do write well, that their human personality is apt to be mere dregs in the sieve. That's why I avoid writers; 'tis a bad trade, exhausting people of their better qualities and replacing them by unkind vanities; writing's now such an art that it has ceased to be in any relation to the need for saying or doing any especial thing. Look at Barrès and d'Annunzio; *they think, because they write*. When they don't write, they don't think; and finally don't think—worth thinking of—at all. Literature, even more than the other arts, requires, for its dominion, to be a servant, *Servus servorum Dei*; and *art for art's sake* means art sterilised for lack of the give and take, the fruitful and effort-saving exchanges and sacrifices of real life. . . .

FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

Moscow.

April 30, 1906.

. . . I am glad you liked the paper by my friend X. I don't know whether you would like *him*, but he is not, thank Heaven, of the Barrès-d'Annunzio kind—all book and no person. He is intensely alive, human; person first and writer afterwards; like *Ethel* in trousers. Do you see? . . .

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Train near Munich.

Sept. 25, 1906.

(*On Wagner*)

. . . About Bayreuth. Although I expected little enjoyment I have been miserably disappointed. It is so much less out of the common than I expected. Just a theatre like any other, save for

LETTER SECTION I

the light being turned out entirely instead of half-cock only, and the only beautiful things an opera ever offers to the eye, namely the fiddles, great and small, and the enchanting kettle-drums, being stuffed out of sight. The *mise en scène* is more grotesquely bad than almost any other operatic get up. What is insufferable to me is the atrocious way in which Wagner takes himself seriously; the self-complacent (if I may coin an absurd expression) auto-religion implied in his hateful unbridled long-windedness and reiteration; the element of degenerate priesthood in it all, like English people's contemplation of their hat linings in church, their prudery about the name of God, as if it were that of some sanitary or medical appliances, or like modern Catholics' (for I'm sure the Middle Ages were different) refusal to smile at the sight of a wax madonna's garters. Surely all great art of every sort has a certain coyness which makes it give itself always less than wanted; look at Mozart; he will give you a whole act of varying dramatic expression (think of the first Act of *Don Giovanni*), of deepest briefest pathos and swift humour, a dozen perfect songs or concerted pieces in the time it takes for that old *poseur* Amfortas to squirm over his grail, or Kundry to break the ice with Parsifal. Even *Tristan*, so incomparably finer than Wagner's other things (I have just heard the *Ring* at *Dresden*) is indecent through its dragging out of situations, its bellowing out of confessions which the natural human being dreads to profane by showing or expressing. With all this goes what to me is the chief psychological explanation of Wagner and of his hypnotiser's power over some person, namely, his extreme *slowness of vital tempo*. Listening to him is like finding oneself in a planet where the time unit is bigger than ours: one is on the stretch, devitalised as by the contemplation of a slug. Do you know who has this same peculiarity? d'Annunzio. And it is this which makes his literature, like Wagner's music, so undramatic, so sensual, so unhuman, turns everything into a process of gloating. I have had the good luck (like Nietzsche) of hearing *Carmen* just after the *Ring*. The humanity of it, and the modesty also, are due very much to the incomparable briskness of the rhythm and phrasing; the mind is made to work quickly, the life of the hearer to brace itself to action. . . .

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FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

(On Wagner)

Oct. 10, 1906.

. . . I was interested in what you say about Bayreuth. I agree *absolutely*. So far as Bayreuth itself goes the only enjoyment to me is the orchestra, which, when I heard it, I thought *divine*; and better than any other I had heard. Now I daresay you hear just as good at Munich and elsewhere. *Then* you didn't. As to Wagner I agree with every word you say; yes, d'Annunzio has the same, exactly the same, quality of slowness and hypnotic mesmerism; also (I think) the gift of doing something to language which introduces another element in it, just as Wagner does with sound. At its worst it is like the noise people make by rubbing the rim of a glass of water; at its best it is something very mysteriously beautiful; and then, attack it as one does and may and does, the fact of the genius and the bigness of scale remains, and the peculiar things Wagner has said which no one else has. For instance, the "sharpness of death" that is in the *traurige Weise* of Kurneal's tune on the pipe in the last act of *Tristan*, the infinite sadness of Brünnhilde's appeal to Siegmund in *Valkyrie* Act II, and the joyousness of *Siegfried's* horn-call. What I like best of all is the *Meistersinger*. As for *Parsifal*, I *abhor* it. It is a grotesque parody of the Mass with conjuring tricks and Oh! the length! Another artist who seems to me in this category is *Swinburne*. Almost every poem of Swinburne is too long; not because it is too long in actual size and length, but because everything that is said lasts too long, the tempo is too much drawn out. Take one of his finest poems, the *Elegy on Bandelairs*. It misses being quite magnificent because every stanza is too long, whereas the whole poem might have been twice as long and yet not too long had Catullus written it for instance. That is why I think Racine (you will disagree) is such a great poet; he is as perfect a master over his means as Mozart, and gives you a thousand lights and shades. . . .

LETTER SECTION I

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Florence.

Jan. 7, 1907.

. . . Do you know how hard it is to feel *hard*?—not to “fall soft on an idea,” as Emerson said? I feel scarcely human.

Good-bye, dear Maurice. Keep a little affection for me; I value it so much from you. . . .

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Il Palmerino,

S. Gervasio,

Florence.

March 3, 1908.

Your letter (though typewritten, which always diminishes human quality) and your very, very dear review, have me given so much pleasure. You are one of the persons—I was very near writing the *one and only person*—who make me have confidence, not in myself, but in the fact of *being read*. It's odd, when people speak or write about my writings I always have the embarrassed feeling one has when others are making a *gaffe*, as if they were attributing someone else's work to me (as old Mrs. Tennant introduced me once as “Austin Lee”)—work which I would sooner have died than written, flat, stale, unprofitable, certainly not *mine*. Instead of which *you* read what I have really wanted to write. What a blessing your friendship, your whole self, are, dear Maurice.

Do remember I want so much to have you here if the chance of Italy offers.

My dear friend, à qui le dites-vous? I am expiring to write, in another form, a diary, or longer essays, even a Garden Book would I write!! which is the lowest degradation of desire. But how get published? Living apart (and at present I cannot forego money entirely) publication in the *Westminster* means far more readers than a volume of mine commands. Do you know that I do not get a brass farthing for my books save what the magazines give? . . .

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FROM M. B. TO VERNON LEE.

Morning Post,
London.

About March 15, 1908.

MY DEAR VERNON,—

Your letter reached me at St. Petersburg. I didn't mean to join that large and intolerable class of people who say, whatever one writes: "why don't you write something else?" who, if you give them oysters, say: "but why aren't they raspberries?"

I should be miserable if you ceased to write in the *Westminster*. I think your plan of saying more than meets the eye admirable, and you might write a whole book of memories bit by bit in the *Westminster*; all the *Dichtung*. The Wahrheit, anyone's, is too sad, as you say.

Thank you for telling me what you told me.

However if you go on simply writing of places I shan't complain; because under such headings you tell one so much—besides the perfume you give to the thing, and the glimpses of wood and hill and sky, and the atmosphere . . .

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Florence.

April 17, 1908.

What a friend you are, dear Mauricel! Your article is far, far too kind. It makes up, and more than makes up, for the little play being passed over in silence. Also for a certain disappointment at having had to break off all pour-parlers with Mrs. Granville Barker. You will have heard of this matter, and will doubtless think like other friends that I ought to have made some sacrifice to getting the play represented. But the play, as "cut" by Mrs. G. B. was no longer *Ariadne*: a *whole* act left out, the dialogue reduced to a skeleton, the opera suppressed, the end changed with a pencil note "Duke's death" to close proceedings. It would have made me sick to think of such a mutilation. I have always said that if Ethel wanted to put the *whole* to music I would cut her a libretto out of it; but that is quite a different thing from allowing such a hash as this to pass for my work. Besides, that whole piece was written in a more inevitable, unconscious way than anything else I have ever done, and I respect its integrity just because it made itself without any act of willing or judgment. . . .

LETTER SECTION I

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Florence.

June 20, 1909.

. . . I have been reading, very, very slowly, every evening, as I read for my own pleasure, your *Year in Russia* and your new Russian book—(about *Proserpine* anon)—and I have felt extraordinarily all the long drawn out and delicately fluctuating drama which forms real friendship. It was you, wasn't it, who said that "being in love" was only a label in shorthand, and that the real contents of the thing was loving, not loving, suspecting, believing, becoming indifferent, minding awfully, von Herzen, mit Schmerzen, klein und wenig, garnicht—über alle Massen! The whole daisy's worth, only the daisy's petals are *our* soul, not the other one's, and they are all equally truthful!

Well, the same thing holds good of friendship, of any living feeling, and all this winter I have been turning over, with the leaves of your books, the invisible leaves of my secret living book called *Maurice*, with the headings: "What! he thinks that!—Oh, how we agree!—no; I fear he is a bit *codino*.* There, of course, he is *really* liberal. Why, he is the only person who loves and hates alternately like me!—Maurice, can you mean that?—Maurice, you are the greatest possible dear, and the more I know of your doings and feelings and thinkings in your third-class Russian trains, among your fine statesmen, among your books, and among the haycocks, the more I like you!" One has to read little as I do (I mean little, except of tiresome scientific specialities) and to live in great spiritual solitude, to *savourer* in this way whatever appeals to one, and turn one's books into chapters of one's innermost life.

Thank you, dear Maurice, for the feeling of perfect companionship you have, merely in being yourself, contrived to give me . . .

As to *Proserpine*. You know that—why I can't conceive—verse always requires an effort on my part. It is like some over-rich food which rarely tempts my feeble appetite, whereas I can always munch prose, even the crustiest or the most doughy. So I had put by *Proserpine*. Well: at the end of the year, a poor friend of mine died at the hospital here. I did not know her very well, but knew *of her* astonishingly, for she had been my German neighbour's housekeeper—a beautiful tragic creature with a

* Over-reactionary.

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sordid destiny, sent from pillar to post by kind folk who would help her with everything except houserom to die in. When at last she did die, and lay, with a stearine-stump only, among our flowers and all the uncleaned pots and pans about her, and when we had followed her open bier up and down corridors and staircases smelling of disinfectants, and across open yards with rain and snow, and finally through a dreadful kind of cellar with vague shapes revealed by clammy sheets and a breath of charnel . . . well, when after all this I got home (the first news of the earthquake was beginning to be posted up and shouted out in the wet streets), I felt pretty well broken down in body and soul. No wish to read, no power to think. On the table by the fire lay your unread *Proserpine*. I took it and read it from end to end, the whole evening. And I understood, my dear Maurice, what the use of poetry is in the world. Yours was very beautiful, carrying into another world the ghosts of one's living experience, no longer terrible, but only solemn. Thank you for that impersonal company you bore me, as well as for the rest, dear Maurice . . .

FROM VERNON LEE TO M. B.

Florence.

December 14, 1913.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

Your Diaries* have given me so much pleasure. Real pleasure, bodily amusement, not the more usual knowledge that a *book is such that it ought to give pleasure*. I read it at night when I wasn't well lately, and felt so grateful. Some parts I foolishly re-read with undiminished effort the next night—particularly *Tiberius* and *Tristram*.

What a wonderful and particular thing this kind of English funniness is; what *Punch* has when good (and *Punch* is always good) and which French people say they haven't got, and sometimes don't even understand; which seems likely, since they require to spice things with the forbidden or the dirty.

I wanted to write to you this summer, but of course didn't, after reading your very fine little terrible book.† I suppose it takes such a spirit of heroic pity as that little book breathes to be able to be as funny as you are, Maurice.

* *Lost Diaries*.

† *Letters from the Near East*.

LETTER SECTION I

A great many things—and time and space not unhappily the most separating—have come, as you know, between us of late years. You have taken different views of politics and religion. And I, as I grow older, become less, instead of more, able to live with people without agreement on such matters. I am, I suppose, a fanatic. But in reading both your books, the tragic one and the funny, I have felt with a rush of pleasure how very fond I am of you, dear Maurice. . . .

LETTERS FROM HENRY BREWSTER TO M. B.

Paris.

Oct. 30, 1902.

. . . Just back; rushed at once to *Gaston* and found with joy that all my former delight returned to me sharper for the assistance of print. And when I say *Gaston* I mean also *Dusk* and the beloved *Tristram*, in the corner of whose shield I am proud and grateful to see my initials.

The simplest and shortest thing I can say to you is that I love your poetry, and that with its occasional negligences it seems to me to have absolute distinction—the distinction of a Greek god who might easily be caught out, I have no doubt, on some point of etiquette by M. Mollard, chef du protocole. I could play M. Mollard myself, I believe, at two or three moments; but I am not such a damned fool. Instead of that I play commercial traveller, and have already “placed” eighteen copies. But that is only a beginning; and I have had pretty thanks already that pass straight over my head and fall at your feet . . .

Rome.

Nov. 25, /02.

. . . I am rather ashamed of myself; it is the third time now that I have read *The Black Prince* and I never can get through it with the hard glittering eye becoming to a veteran wrecker. I am afraid I shall never be able to read it out loud. It is one of the most touching things in literature, and certainly a beautiful poem; that much I could make out in the typewritten copy, but print blazons it forth in glaring evidence.

All the little volume is charming. . . . There is nothing I

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would have left out, and there are not many volumes of verse of which I could say as much. Welcome, singer, in a world in which there are hungry ears and almost nobody to say anything they care to listen to.

Many, many thanks.

Yours, H. B.

Rome.

Xmas, 1903.

. . . As regards your plays, if they don't find favour at present it is of no matter, and I don't know if they could be acted even by the best of actors. . . . The public would not see the atmosphere in your plays; it has not learned to look for that sort of thing. It has learned to say: "this is an interesting story" or "it is not a very interesting story." It knows how to say "funny fellow, that Gaston!" or "What the devil does Tristram mean, and who is fooling who in this show?" . . .

You must write plays because you love to, and for no other reason. I want to know if a woman is to stop having children because her babes are not made Knights of the Garter when they are six weeks' old? She has other reasons—and the best possible—for going on with the game.

At the present moment M. C. is getting up in New York the performance of his last drama. There will be 800 people, chiefly camels and elephants, on the stage at the same moment. That babe will have the Golden Fleece. But I doubt if it has been conceived in joy. A horrid scrofulous little brute it will be, I imagine.

I have the conviction that your plays are beautiful. In 1870 or 1871 I found in the galleries of the Odéon a poor little "plaquette"—a few rough pages of verse. Nobody that I knew had ever heard of the author, and it was years before I saw his name mentioned in the Press or heard him talked of; but I had stored the name in my memory as that of a great poet. It was Verlaine. And I may be right again this time. Perhaps Verlaine's friends told him that his verses were doubtless pretty, but that he had better write novels or plays for the Gymnase. Certainly they never made him rich and it is a mere chance that he didn't die unknown. If he had, it wouldn't have harmed him. He had touched his full salary the very hour he wrote them.

I don't believe garlands ever fall on the poet's head; they collect

LETTER SECTION I

round the neck of his ghost who stands in front of him, or behind. And the ghost bows, and smiles, and smirks or struts, and it is all so indifferent and so far off to the other fellow who sits there, maybe, like Verlaine, strumming rhythms on the table of a dirty little café! Or perhaps the friends said: "Don't go on writing lyrics. Who cares for lyrics? Write a nice little play like Coppée's *Passant*. Don't love for money, but love where money is!"

This is the most dangerous of all advice because there's a grain of truth in it. In little things we must be wise. Never in great ones. If a man has literary success in view (as his friends invariably have for him) it must be a small thing to shift his sails. But if he has nothing in view at all, if he is just a poor fool, like a nightingale or a god, a silkworm or a poet, then I suppose he has no choice. He will have plenty of scope for wisdom and skill in how he does his work, not in the choosing of it. . . . I don't mind anybody writing *for money* ("F.M.") or *for success* ("F.S."). That is his business, and business is business. But let there be no mixing up of initials. Let "M.B." be pure and unadulterated "M.B." That is probably why Bacon signed "Shakespeare"; he wanted to keep the initials distinct. . . .

Rome.

May 31, -05.

. . . The demon of dumbness has been sitting on my shoulders, but I was grateful for *Mahasena* and the lyrics, all of which I like and two of which delight me . . . *Prayer* and *Tristram*.

The play is beautiful. If you called it "dramatic poem" instead of "drama" it might do away with some objections that foolish people make. Definition seems to be the only intellectual amusement of the millions. Present them with a work of art; it is too fatiguing for them to find out if they enjoy it or not, so they rush to the easier pleasure of classification. "Does this play correspond to my notion of a *Drama*?" "Does this building fully realise my conception of a Church?" "If not, poet and architect have blundered," etc. Names! Names! . . .

Call your plays as you choose; I hope you will write many more of them. I see them as frescoes, and there are dozens of skilful writers who can turn a neat sonnet, to one who can fling a great vision on the wall. . . .

XXIII

“FLYING CORPS HEADQUARTERS”

The Puppet Show of Memory ends in the summer of 1914, when, on the way home from Russia, Baring learned that the Emperor of Austria's heir had been murdered at Sarajevo.

In a strictly limited sense this War Diary may rank as a continuation of the Memoirs. The first few pages are of value as showing that four days before Sir Edward Grey's famous speech in the House of Commons, that is on the evening of July 31st, 1914, neither Count Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador, with whom he was dining, nor the French Ambassador, who was present, thought there was any chance of England coming into the war. Follows a brief, sober, yet extraordinarily vivid picture of the then state of mind in London—a nightmare oppression of spirit in which hopes and fears swayed to and fro like ghosts in a sinister fog.

Reading these pages the present writer could but recall the horror of those same July days as spent at St. Malo. Early in the month the French had seemed in no serious apprehension of war, but one morning it was discovered that the seven German waiters at our Hotel had silently melted away in the night, putting in no claim for wages due. Next day came the mobilisation order, accompanied by wildest enthusiasm and outbursts of fury against Germany, followed presently by an experience that all our countrymen then in France will easily rank as the bitterest of their lives—the perpetual question addressed to us: “Mais l'Angleterre ne va pas nous *lâcher*, n'est-ce pas?”* At length August 4th brought the answer which, fighting down our own agonised fears, we had declared was as certain as sunrise; not

* Surely England is not going to *abandon* us?

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till long afterwards did we know how near the sun of England had been to setting in eternal dishonour.

After the usual succession of doubts and certainties as to his fate, Baring went out to France with Sir David Henderson as Lieutenant in the Intelligence Department attached to Headquarters of the Flying Corps, and one realises of what use his mastery of foreign languages must have been from the first. In the Spring of 1915 General Henderson was called to London as Head of the Air Department at the War Office, and his successor, General Trenchard, decided to keep Baring—as it were, on trial—for a month. The frivolously disposed might maintain that the issue was decided by a pot of marmalade. On August 23rd Baring had overheard the General say that he liked Oxford marmalade, and next day a pot of it appeared on the tea-table. “I see you have a memory,” remarked the General; “*I shall use it.*” There was no further question of possible departure, and evidently the General was as good as his word, for whatever Baring’s official status may have been, the motto of the book, quoted as a “Saying in the Flying Corps,” is “Make a note of that, Baring!”

At the time war broke out, flying, and more particularly military flying, was in its infancy, and what the Corps owed to the drive of its new commander must be read between the lines, for never was a man more averse to publicity than General Trenchard—a trait that is rigidly respected by the author of this book. Among the few remarks he permits himself is, that where other men were satisfied with investigating a request, a grievance, a need, or a suggestion, and urging its being dealt with at once, this General would insist on knowing the sequel; whether Squadron B had received its split pin, what Mr. C. in London had replied when asked for it, and so on. “This,” adds Baring, “did not conduce to our repose, but it did further the efficiency of the R.F.C.”

A man who for a while was in touch with our air force handed me a phrase I have never forgotten. “If,” he said, “on issuing an order, the General was told it would be executed *as soon as*

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possible, he would remark: '*What's wrong with to-day?*' and the thing was done then and there." (This is a phrase to be remembered when one is tempted to put off something unutterably boring—such as writing an intricate business letter.)

By 1916 our Flying Corps had attained undisputed supremacy in the air, and the General used to say that if the war had ended then, England would have gone down to history in a blaze of glory. Baring quotes an extract from the diary of a German infantry soldier written about that time: "One can hardly show oneself in the trenches owing to the English airmen. It is a wonder they don't come and pull one out of them, so low do they fly. Not one of our German heroes is to be seen. We are constantly told of the brilliant proportion—81 to 29—but the fact that the English fliers are a thousand times bolder than ours is not mentioned." One day an amusing notice-board appeared in front of the German trenches: "Tell your . . . flying Corps to leave us alone. *We are Saxons!*" (As it happened they were Bavarians.)

Chapter XIII of this book gives a few typical exploits of our airmen during the operations on the Somme, to read which "rises your heart," as they say in Ireland. Later on the German machines and methods took a sharp upward turn, and however it may have been in earlier days, I believe their fliers ceased to merit reproaches from the men in the trenches. But those who leap to and create a new standard of achievement should never be forgotten. To-day, where this and that ocean is flown as though it were nothing, I hope none will ever forget that Blériot was the first man to fly the Channel.

The distinctive feature of this book is a blend of not too thickly sown technical details such as probably will always appeal to historically-minded fliers, and word-pictures such as only an artist could paint. In the *Translations with Originals* referred to above, you have poetry pure of technicalities; in the *Diary*, a paragraph that begins with "sterling-set-transmitters," "short-wave tuners" and such-like, is apt to glide easily into a vision . . .



Auberon Herbert, Lord Lucas.

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perhaps of a sunset: “The west was all a blaze of gold, but it was still raining and the raindrops pattered in the leaves of the trees. The fields to the right were burnished by the sunset; two white horses were ploughing but it was too dark to see the ploughman. The little grey town with its red roofs stood out in clear outline, and the Cathedral which dominated it looked like a bird protecting her young.”

Or take a paragraph like this: “Clips are wanted for the clock-mounting in the F.E.2B. Longcroft was shot at while he was in a kite balloon by a Lewis gun,* and I suppose someone must have let off the gun.”

Then come two lines from *La Fontaine*:

“Le long d’un clair ruisseau buvait une colombe,
Quand, sur l’eau se penchant, une fourmis y tombe.”

There are, as one would expect, poignant sketches of friends who one day went up in the air and were never seen again. One short passage indicates Lord Lucas’s astounding career and the quality of his superb, unquenchable vitality; and we may envy Baring to whom it was given to create, with his *Elegy*, a memorial worthy of that great friend of his about whom was the nimbus that belongs to names like Roland, Dunois, or Philip Sidney—a figure who always seemed to the present writer one of the most “splendid” it is possible to conceive. But of Major Basil Barrington-Kennett, with whom Baring was unacquainted before the war, there is an almost equally beautiful prose memorial in this book.

One unforgettable passage concerns the old Etonian Dinner on June 4th, 1917, at St. Omer. “There were three hundred old Etonians present; I knew five by sight. There was not one representative of the Julian and Billy Grenfell generation. They have all been killed. The rest were either much older than me or much younger.” And he goes on to inform us that after dinner “everything in the room was broken—all the plates, all the glass, all the tables, the chandeliers, the windows, the doors, the people.”

* i.e., One of our own guns.

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That this brief mention of the wiping out in his beloved old school of a whole generation, and a record of an after-dinner rag shoulder each other in this paragraph will astonish none of Baring's countrymen—or women. But one cannot help wondering whether in other countries the supreme note of comradeship is to smash everything you can lay hands on. Or is it, as more than one foreigner has remarked, that Englishmen remain school-boys at heart to the last day of their lives?

As in all Baring's books you come across delightful human episodes, beginning with an account of his own early struggles with puttees when working up his uniform for the front. Six well-meaning persons did their best to help him, but the only really successful first-aid friend was Sir David Henderson himself! What would Germans say to a General showing a newly-fledged amateur Lieutenant how to put on his puttees! Then we hear of a naval squadron that was temporarily attached to them asking for the *military* oil used by "No. 32," as being so much better than their own *naval* oil; how when they all went over to No. 32, No. 32 begged to be given *naval* oil because of its superiority to their own *military* oil; and how it turned out in the end that the two oils were identical.

Also, as Baring has spoken with passionate admiration of the Chinese as studied by him during the Manchurian campaign, here are a couple of rather more up-to-date Chinese episodes:

No. 1. (*From a letter.*) "The Chinese have struck. They were supplied with American bread, and when it became impossible to go on supplying them with it they were given an equal quantity of French bread which is better. But they said it had *holes* in it so that they lost in the transaction. Hence the strike."

No. 2. (*From another letter.*) "Yesterday one of the Chinese labourers engaged on building aerodromes was delivered of a child. This caused great surprise. It is unprecedented in the annals of labour and war work."

* * * * *

I hope the dragging in here of a personal incident may be

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forgiven, inasmuch as it shows that where friendship is concerned Baring has always been equal to any act of heroism!

In either 1916 or '17—I forget which—I was in Paris, and got a letter from him saying that he and the General would be there for two days and a night that week, and perhaps we could meet at the house of our mutual friend, Madame Bulteau; would I try and arrange it? Now at that time I had just begun work on my first literary attempt, *Impressions that Remained*, and on the strength of it did a really cruel thing. I sent three or four chapters in manuscript—not even typewritten—to his hotel, with a note “to await arrival,” saying I entreated him to do me the great favour of reading them before our meeting, and afterwards of giving me his frank opinion. Imagine asking this of a man released from the front for a few hours, whose every second in Paris would, I knew, be crammed to bursting with aeroplane business! *But I did!*

He arrived that evening and next day my MS. was returned, he having spent most of the night reading it. He had even found time to scribble a few lines of generous encouragement, including the following priceless hint: “In a few places,” he said, “I find the wording not as *easy* as the rest. I’ve marked them with crosses and want you to rewrite them—*just as if you were writing to me or H. B.*” (Henry Brewster, who was then dead.)

Of course I saw what he meant, rewrote various other passages that he would certainly have marked had time allowed, and swore an oath to myself to avoid this pitfall in the future.

* * * * *

In 1917, Baring, who had long since attained the rank of Captain, became a Major, on which occasion he remarks: “A Captain is supposed to combine the fire of the subaltern with the discretion of the Field Officer. Good-bye to the fire of the subaltern!” Yet embers of the Captain’s fire must still have been glimmering, for that Etonian dinner occurred only a month before his promotion. One is justified in suspecting that on these smashing occasions Baring had always played a leading

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part. In 1897 a man in my brother's regiment said he had recently been present at a tea-party given by Baring, which for some reason or other hung fire. At last their host seized the sugar-basin and hurling it against the wall exclaimed: "What a hell of a party!" Whether this treatment cured or killed the party I do not remember.

This book brings home to the layman how heavily a growing divergence of opinion between Whitehall and those at the front as to the proper use of the Flying arm must have weighed on the man responsible for the Field Flying Force. The reaction of certain politicians, and a section of the public, to the attacks of German aircraft on this country was a perpetual clamour for a larger defence force. But General Trenchard was convinced that the only effective reply to German raids was to raid Germany, and that a defensive policy in the air would spell ruin—a point of view which people whose Battersea homes had recently been gutted by a German bomb were not slow to appreciate.

Behind this divergence of opinion was the General's abiding, and, as we have seen, justifiable conviction that the Germans would not sit down quietly under the superiority of our airmen; and crowning all was an uncomfortable doubt as to our ability to keep pace with them in the construction of improved aircraft. The whole problem is lucidly and fairly stated by Baring, who also makes clear to non-experts the difference between the bombing of England by an enemy who commands the North Sea and can use Belgium as jumping-off place, and the bombing of German towns, between which and us is the English Channel and the whole of France with her mountainous Eastern frontier. These, and other points bearing on warfare such as General Trenchard longed to wage, do not occur, I fancy, to us average lay and arm-chair warriors; anyhow, they did not in those days.

At the end of December, 1917, General Trenchard was appointed Chief of the Air Staff in London, and five months later he had brought into being an Independent Air Force, formed for

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the express purpose of raiding Germany under his command. Thankful as were most people that November 11th of that year brought the Armistice, one wishes that the General, who took Baring with him on this new venture, had had more time to drive home the soundness of his contention.

* * * * *

To sum up, one can say of this book what has been said of *The Puppet Show*, the *Russian* studies, and all Baring's journalistic work: that for reasons it would be tedious to enumerate it is as unlike other war books as the author is unlike other diarists. Reading it again for the purpose of writing these few pages, I reflected that the difference between Dr. Johnson's account of the Hebridean Tour and that of Boswell is, that whereas the Doctor concentrates on what he himself *desires to say* (including the firm driving home of certain admirable beliefs and principles), Boswell instinctively concentrates on what ordinary mortals *desire to hear*, and on what will give them the most lifelike picture of his hero under novel circumstances.

Whether consciously or not, this is Baring's method; and the result is that unless his subject is one calculated to produce convulsions of distaste in the reader—such as the mind of Count Keyserling or the Habits of the Ant—once you begin one of his chronicling efforts you cannot put it down. Arnold Bennett once replied to a friend who asked him what he thought of a certain book: “All I know is that it held me. *I have no other test.*” Nor, I fancy, if we are honest, has anyone else.

PART III

THE NOVELS

XXIV

INTRODUCTION

THE year 1921 saw the beginning of a new stage in Baring's literary career, namely the appearance of the first of a long series of novels which I venture to consider his most important contribution to literature.

Up to now this author's path had not been easy travelling. Readers who do not shy away from Letter Sections as animals do from corpses will have noticed, that in 1919 Baring declares that every book he writes begins by vain journeys to about five publishers; and a little later he remarks that so far his only readers are Countess Benckendorff, an unknown Irishman, and myself! But these were perhaps "Lies written in Dejection (not) near Naples," and may be discounted.

I expect, however, that from the very first the variety of his output baffled the reviewers. "Is this man a poet," they will have asked themselves, "or a journalist who has made a stunt of Russia, or a playwright whose plays don't pay, or an essayist, or what?" And publishers, aware that the majority of readers wish and expect an author to go on writing the same book all his life, were distrustful of this wilful person who apparently wrote for his own pleasure. Indeed, prior to Messrs. Heinemann's sporting decision to collect all strays and embark on a complete edition of his works, it was hardly possible for a notion to gradually build itself up in the consciousness of the public as to the worth of this writer.

Yet in a certain sense he still had to live down the rich variety of his gift, for not every reader can instantly detect and catch firm

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hold of the thread of a personality, which, without obtruding itself, binds these diverse emanations of his spirit into a whole.

* * * * *

And now, with the appearance of the novels, in which he revealed himself as an ardent convert to Rome, fresh difficulties arose; some were bored at religion being "dragged in" at all; to others it was quite obvious that Baring was an agent of the Vatican and bent on the conversion of England. Last year, after the *Quarterly Review* had published an article of mine about him, letters came pouring in enquiring if I was aware that proselytising—or as an extra-excitabile correspondent put it, "religious body-snatching"—is among the duties imposed on "perverts like Mr. Baring"?

One took pleasure in assuring these correspondents what anyone who knows him would go to the stake on—that the idea of propaganda-mongering never entered his head. Also one asked whether we are nowadays too materialised to believe that for some queer people the chief thing in life is the relation of the soul to God; and will it not be admitted that what the heart is full of the mouth is apt to utter? So it was with Tolstoi and all the great Russians; so it is to-day with Claudel, Huysmanns and other French writers of fiction. I also suggested that had he joined another religious communion, the letters "M. B." might have stood for *Maurice Booth*, and instead of accompanying his puppets to the Oratory in Brompton Road, we should have them ringing the bell and lifting the door-knocker at 103, Queen Victoria Street, Headquarters of the Salvation Army.

Of course, some people maintain that an "obsession" of any kind interferes with the æsthetic purity of works of art. As life-long opponent of the theory of Art for Art's sake I totally disagree, and should like to ask whether the "æsthetic purity" of the Song of Solomon is clouded by the "obsession" on which it is based? Of course you may say "O! but we all are ready to

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put up with *that* obsession." Yet even a universally popular note like love has to be enriched and carried off by other elements, otherwise the work suffers. Once the first excess of youth has spent itself, a good deal of the work of writers like Swinburne and Pierre Louys leaves a once red-hot admirer as cold as a stone. I think no one can say that Baring's novels are swamped artistically by an excessive preoccupation with religion, and if the relation of the soul to God be an obsession, why did no one object to it in John Inglesant?

An apology would be offered for expending even half an ounce of energy on this theme, were it not that, dragged out into the light of day, religious intolerance is seen for what it is—a foolish legacy of uncivilised ages, only fit to be shot on to the rubbish heap with dictatorships, censorship, and hemlock prescriptions for silencing inconvenient people. At the end of his life Goethe uttered words that no doubt will not be found in present-day editions of his works: "It will be a long time before we Germans will be able to say of ourselves, that *once upon a time* we were barbarians." One hates hearing the top note of barbarism—religious intolerance—piped in England.

Nor was the prominence of religion—above all, of an alien religion—the only charge brought against Baring's earlier novels by people who whole-heartedly admired other works of his. "Why," they would complain, "do his marriages and love affairs invariably end in disaster?" And as passionate worshipper of Dickens I confess to an occasional yearning for a happy ending—even for a touch of what Baring calls in one of his letters the "dentist's optimism" of Browning! Well . . . at such moments we must simply go to another literary emporium.

The true answer to a grumble which, to be frank, I consider legitimate is, perhaps, that those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick; and, ruthlessly as this author wrings one's heart, he makes up for it by handing us a talisman. In fact, without realising it any more than Monsieur Jourdain realised he had spoken prose all his life, most certainly without any idea of mounting the pulpit and in a far wider sense than as

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heartener-up of young and discouraged artists, the Baring of the novels is a great moral force.

Take one instance among many. Blanche in *Cat's Cradle* is not the only mortal whose unconscious self-love has devastated her own life and the lives of many others, and who, at the last—youth, health and happiness gone—has to face the fact that the game is lost, and only one thing left to hope for—Death.

But in his books Baring is never weary of showing that the game is not lost after all. In one of them a priest is made to say: "Life is almost intolerable—*but not quite*"; and the office of this great artist is, more convincingly perhaps than many a professional preacher, to point down the road that leads to that "*not quite*." This is what was meant by "a talisman"; and though in his novels the story itself is always arresting, I should find it as impossible to think of them without the talisman-element as to read *Don Quixote* and ignore what underlies the farce.

Anyhow, one thing is certain; what possibly alienates certain readers, powerfully and beneficently affects others. Without being actively religious some of us cannot get on without religion. At intervals we pray, but going to Church bores us. Sometimes we think about Christ, but what with the films, the wireless, and a constant spate of detective novels, it is difficult to settle down to the New Testament. We cling to the idea of Holy Communion and would make short work of a Ludendorff who should stump the country on the thesis that these are superstitions the world has outgrown. But having hurried out of bed in order to attend Early Service, we are headed back on the stairs by a smell of eggs and bacon. . . .

Somewhere, I think in *Middlemarch*, George Eliot says that an affection should be watched over like other precious possessions, and this applies pre-eminently to treasures of the soul. I think Baring's novels must cause many of us to wonder if one was always the half-cold effigy staring at us out of the mirror . . . or is it that we have gradually become like that? If so, and if with a shock we realise that before long it may be a case of cold ashes on a cold hearth, the gospel of Baring's books is that

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a dying fire can be rekindled. And . . . who knows? . . . Perhaps a pull will be taken before it is too late. . . .

* * * * *

The other day, pasted into an old copy of *Cat's Cradle*, I came upon part of a striking article by Mr. Desmond MacCarthy. It was written at the time *The Lonely Lady of Dulwich* appeared, which book, being a very short one, led him to speak of the French *Nouvelles*, and point out that in them a single episode is treated as complete in itself; for which reason the same tests can be applied as to other works of art.

But, he went on, as regards larger works of fiction another standard is called for; and here occurred the passage I cut out which I think fits not only *Cat's Cradle* but all Proust. "The great novels of the world" (he says) "are shapeless. They owe their high place in literature to what they contain, not to their form; to unforgettable characters and situations, or to their having expressed somehow *the author's deepest response to life*" (the italics are mine). "You cannot," he goes on to say, "find with any certainty a centre in *War and Peace* or *David Copperfield*. You can only say that the stuff out of which these stories are made is magnificent, and that all you felt, thought, and saw while you read them was supremely worth while." And the passage concludes with a very delightful sentiment: "This may be a critical heresy, but I have never been able to rid myself of it. To me the point of these great amorphous books has been *their value in terms of vicarious living*."

This fine confession of faith set me thinking of something that will often be pointed out in the following analysis of Baring's novels; the magic stop so often used in his music, which, uniting past, present, and future in one shining dewdrop, emancipates from the thraldom of the personal calendar. Herein lies—for one of his admirers at least—what I had almost called his most unique and priceless "response to life," but there is another still more priceless response that goes even farther and deeper.

The youngest and most light-hearted among us will know

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some day, though one cannot expect them to realise it now, that man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. For which reason, he who by the exercise of his genius helps us without boring us to make friends with sorrow, sickness, and death, may well, when his hour comes, cry: "*Nunc dimittis*;" for he will not have lived in vain.

XXV

"PASSING BY"

THE architecture of Baring's first novel, *Passing By*, which appeared in 1921, is original. The whole story, a short one, is told in letters from Guy Cunninghame—a gay young diplomat, cousin of Lord Ayton, the hero—and in wonderfully dry extracts from the diary of Godfrey Mellor—one of the young men in Ayton's office (Ayton is an Under Secretary), whose reading is confined to *The Times* and *Jane Eyre*, the latter, which he considers the finest novel ever written, being his perennial bedside book.

At the time *Passing By* appeared, there was much discussion as to the conduct of the heroine, Mrs. Housman—a fascinating and artistically gifted créole who is also a devout Roman Catholic—when overtaken by the crisis of her life. Her openly unfaithful but otherwise not unkind husband expects her to receive his mistresses one after the other, wherein she obliges him; and all goes smoothly on the surface till the charming and amiable Ayton falls passionately in love with her. And though he is obviously of inferior clay to herself his passion is returned.

One day the cup of her misery overflows; she agrees to elope with Ayton, leaving a note for her husband saying she has left him. As she enters the hotel in London a telegram informs her that Housman has had a stroke. Ayton, who is waiting for her at the railway station, receives a message that she is on her way home, and Housman dies that night without recovering consciousness.

In their intimate circle the fact of Ayton's infatuation had long been no secret, and all expect that in due season the couple will marry; but after two months of total seclusion Mrs. Housman enters a convent and announces her intention of taking the veil.

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As she had foreseen, all her friends are aghast at what they consider the selfishness of this step and its cruelty to the man who loved her; but through a mutual friend she sends a special message to Mellor: “Tell him I know he will understand”; that is, understand that having been saved by God’s Grace from mortal sin, she has no right to grasp at what the world would consider blameless felicity.

As Madame Bulteau once said, Mellor was one of those “grands amoureux” whose love is so deep, and of so sacred a character that they never even confess it to themselves. It is only from short entries in his diary that you guess he has loved Mrs. Housman from the first; and evidently she had gauged the quality of his spirit.

Meanwhile Cunninghame, persuaded that Ayton is dying of a broken heart, entreats Mellor to consult some competent authority as to the possibility of influencing Mrs. Housman’s decision before the five probationary years of novitiate shall have elapsed; so Mellor asks for an interview with a certain Father Stanway, whom he had once met at the Housmans’, and who had struck him as a wise and saintly man.

This interview contains one of the best statements of the Church’s angle to problems of this kind, and also one of the best defences of it, that I have come across. Mellor tells the story as concerning a certain Mrs. X, and Y the man who loves her. Probably Father Stanway will guess whom those letters stand for, but Mellor is certain that his communication will be as safe as though uttered in the confessional.

Finally, the priest having told him that the Church could and would raise no objection to the marriage, Mellor asks with some impatience why, then, she refuses to marry? It goes against the grain to mutilate the ensuing dialogue, but I cannot refrain from quoting the priest’s reply as recorded in Mellor’s diary.

“I think you are a musician, Mr. Mellor?” asked Father Stanway. I said music was my one and sole hobby. He said he would try and express himself in terms of harmony. “Perhaps

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Mrs. X has a great sense of harmony herself," he began. "If she married Y that would make a legitimate harmony, certainly. But her very feeling for the *full* harmony of life would make it impossible" (and he said this with startling emphasis) "for her to use X's death *as a means for doing rightly what she had meant to do wrongly*. For her intention to do it wrongly had in a measure caused his death, and with the harmony of her marriage, the memory of that discord would always be present.

"She is now free to enter upon a perfect harmony and love by marrying Christ, which I imagine she had always wanted to do even in the normal married state; for marriage is a Sacrament, and unites the soul to God by Grace. But I understand from you that her marriage was such a travesty of marriage that she felt she couldn't worship Christ through that, and so swung across and decided she couldn't be in relation with Him at all. Then comes this catastrophe, and the pendulum swings back, and stops up."

It had not been difficult to the priest to deal with a previous question of Mellor's, as to whether, instead of securing the calm and safety of her own religious life at the cost of shattering the happiness of another, the nobler choice would not have been to take up the unselfish and less pleasant duty of staying in the world. But now came words of hope and comfort for him who would suffer more deeply than anyone under Mrs. X's decision.

"It may be for him a beginning," he said, "not an end; it may lead him to some eventual happiness; it may be welding his nature and his life for some undreamed-of purpose—a purpose he may afterwards be led to recognise and bless 'with tears of recognition' . . . The only way in which peace comes to the human soul is in accepting the will of God; 'In la sua volontade è nostra pace'."*

Some six months after this interview Mellor went down alone for a few days to the Cornish village of which Father Stanway was priest, and where three years ago he had for the first time stayed with the Housmans. He went to church to hear Father Stanway preach, and it was perhaps because the preacher caught sight of

* In His Will is our peace.

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him from the pulpit that he introduced into his sermon two quotations which, at Mellor's request, he copied out for him. Both, says the Diary, were from Thomas à Kempis. One of them is: "By so much the more does a man draw nigh to God as he goes away from all earthly solace." The other: "Whosoever is not ready to suffer all things and to stand resigned to the will of his beloved is not worthy to be called a lover." After which, as last line of this book, comes a significant entry in Mellor's diary bearing the date of the following day.

Tues., Aug. 28th. "I have resolved to give up keeping this diary."

* * * * *

It gives the writer special pleasure to say that in this book the great god Fun, who, alas, is about to hide his head from Baring for some twelve years, plays his usual part of lending another pair of wings to the story. The side-issues are intensely amusing; particularly the duels between Mr. Housman's sister, "Miss Sarah," and his latest mistress, Mrs. Park, whom he has invited to join them in Cornwall. A deadly stupid ex-opera prima donna, with the semi-royal manner of her kind, she is careful to make it clear that she no longer mixes in the artistic world, having risen to the top and soared out of it into higher spheres. "Years ago," she remarked after dinner, "when I was at Balmoral, and dear Queen said she reminded me of Grisi." "I suppose you mean," put in someone, "that she said *you* reminded *her* of Grisi"; but Mrs. Park drew herself up stiffly and said she meant what she said.

Miss Sarah, an accomplished musician, fiercely resented this lady's presence in the family circle, but could not refuse to accompany her in an aria out of *Cavalleria*. Mrs. Park said she was playing too fast (a frequent result of fury) and refused to go on singing. Mrs. Housman good-naturedly stepped into the breach, but this was more than Miss Sarah could bear, so she tore her sister-in-law from the piano, declaring that she was playing too slow (with which Mrs. Park agreed) and finished accompanying the aria herself.

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The ensuing dispute, as described by Cunninghame in a letter to his sister, is killingly funny. Housman fussed about the room in great agitation saying: "Never mind, never mind; we are all very tired to-night; it's the east wind," to which Mrs. Park replied that she always sang her best in an east wind. At this moment Cunninghame caught Mrs. Housman's eye and both were seized with an uncontrollable, undisguisable fit of laughter, perceiving which Mrs. Park swept from the room in a rage followed by "Bert."

Later on in the story Mrs. Housman, who had gone abroad, leaving the Staines villa to Bert and Mrs. Park's quite intolerable successor, was inveigled home by a family friend—at the private instigation of Bert—in order to rescue him from the rapacity and bullying of his lady love. Inimitably ridiculous little touches like this, and thumb-nail sketches of other characters, swarm in these pages. I remember that when first I read the book, not being yet broken to Baring's touch as novelist, the figure of Mrs. Housman seemed to me too lightly sketched. To-day this seems to me an incredibly stupid piece of criticism; her personality pervades the story like an exquisite and unanalysable perfume.

To pass to what I believe to be the true heart of the book, my impression is, that here, perhaps unconsciously, the writer felt himself impelled to state through the agency of his puppets the reasons that, after years of meditation caused him to enter the Roman Communion.

In nearly all his novels the Church plays a part of some kind, and sometimes you get in one single episode the lesson of *Passing By* squeezed into a nutshell. But nowhere except in the first is what amounts to a deliberate *apologia* of his religion. I suppose it is inevitable in a work of that nature that hard, contemptuous remarks about the Anglican and other Churches, and about all mental operations that are not in the Catholic tradition, should issue from the mouth of the typical convert "Reilly." And possibly, though I do not recall the fact, at the time the book

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appeared this may have irritated me. If so, it was rather a crude movement of the spirit. Such smoke or flame as may hang about the book is an inevitable accompaniment of inner changes and convulsions—whether slow and gentle, or rapid and violent—such as induce people to leave one Church and enter another. I have not read the book in which Holmboe, the Scandinavian who became a convinced and fervent Moslem, recounts his spiritual adventures, but no doubt similar elements cling to the flanks and summit of his *apologia*.

If I mention this feature—inoffensively as it figures in *Passing By*—it is for two reasons. Firstly to forewarn people of my own persuasion who have not yet read the book but intend to, begging them before they begin to rub up their intelligence and their charity and not fling the little volume away in a pet when they arrive at certain paragraphs. Secondly because, speaking as one who, whatever one's deviation from the religious life, has a profound and growing admiration for the Anglican Church, it strikes me as remarkable that such passages have never roused one's indignation, nor affected the conviction, that, besides being a work of art, this book is as noble as it is beautiful.

XXVI

"THE PUPPET SHOW OF MEMORY"—"OVERLOOKED"
—"A TRIANGLE"—"C"

The Puppet Show of Memory (May 1922)

THE following year appeared what many people consider Baring's masterpiece, *The Puppet Show of Memory*; and if I did not dislike pitting one book against another, and if to compare memoirs and novels were not as foolish as to compare an umbrella and a golf-club, I might possibly be of the same opinion.

Having quoted largely from *The Puppet Show* in the early (biographical) part of the present volume, even if this section were not consecrated solely to the novels I would only say here, that it is one of the most enchanting books in the world, and, as record, wonderfully convincing; pure even of the amount of lying that Goethe declared was permissible in works of this kind. Not that he put it quite like that, but he was careful to explain why his own Memoirs bear the title *Truth and Fiction*,* for that is what the word "Dichtung" amounts to here.

Having been asked by Mr. Baring not to carry the biographical part of this study beyond 1914, where *The Puppet Show* comes to an end, one cannot help cherishing the hope that some day he will tell the story of the succeeding years himself.

Overlooked (September, 1922)

Four months after *The Puppet Show* was published, appeared the first of two little novels that now strike me as "breathers"

* *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

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indulged in by Baring, before giving the world one of his finest works, *C.* I confess I never cared about the first of the couple, *Overlooked*, and like it still less now; but I will make a confession.

The taste (and the talent) for reading detective novels is not given to everyone. Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, in both of whom I delight, were, I believe, forerunners and contemporaries of Edgar Wallace. But of the works of this celebrated man there is scarce one in which I have successfully followed the intricacies of the plot. They say he used to dictate three or four of them at once, and I have often suspected that occasionally a page or two fell to the wrong typist. But his readers don't mind that. Once I asked a really intelligent man to explain to me clearly who had done what in the Edgar Wallace story he had so warmly recommended. After listening carefully I came to the conclusion that he had no precise idea on the subject, but his enjoyment of the book had not been impaired thereby. It is a case, I suppose, of the Emperor's new clothes in the Fairy Tale; only readers are grown-ups, and afraid to cry out like the child in the story: "But he's naked!"

Now *Overlooked* is a psychological detective novel, and I admit that the explanation is graspable by the meanest intelligence and extremely ingenious. The *Dramatis Personae* are an observant delicate-fibred blind man, a trashy novelist, a stodgy English lover, a comparatively animated foreign one, a typically worldly aunt, and her niece, the heroine, who somebody suggested must, as child, have fallen asleep under a tree and been "overlooked" by the fairies; I cannot help adding that the spell seems to have turned her into the most tiresome young woman in fiction.

But the trouble is that all the characters are tiresome, and what with their baffling physical displacements—now here, now there—and their still more baffling psychological convolutions, by the time one who lacks the stamina of the hardened reader of detective novels arrives at the last pages, well-oiled key in hand, he is too limp to put it in the lock.

I ask myself, as I did fifteen years ago, how this particular writer happened to produce what seems to me such an unsatisfactory bit

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of work. I suppose exactly in the same way that people slip up in the street. They tread on a piece of orange peel; and that's all there is to it.

A Triangle (November, 1923)

The second of Baring's "breathers" is far more attractive than the first, but evidently the detective virus was still active and had to be written out of his system. Both the heroes are men of rather uncomfortable disposition and were unfortunately inspired in their choice of wives; but anyhow, the figures in *A Triangle* are not mere machines for passing remarks, as in *Overlooked*. Yet in spite of such character drawing as there is, I confess I do not visualise, do not *feel* any single one of these people.

Probably this style of sketchy draughtsmanship is proper to the technique of the mystery architect; but it is not forbidden to rejoice that these are Baring's last excursions into that country. The novels to come are thick with moral problems, but presented as one element, if the most important, in scenes from the vast drama of life. Whereas in the puzzle-novelette they are the sole reason for its existence.

In a word, I refuse to take these two little books quite seriously. We are told that Jove sometimes nods. My belief is, that before embarking on a big effort like *C*, Baring wisely determined to take a *siesta*. And what in other men would have been gentle snoring, turned in this phenomenally active brain into *Overlooked* and *A Triangle*.

C (June, 1924)

The first part of this in every sense of the word great novel resembles *The Puppet Show of Memory* in that both deal with home life, school, college and crammers. But how differently are these scenes lit! In a letter appended in this book* Mr. G.

* See p. 340

Bernard Shaw remarks that Baring's account of his own early days is “unique as record of a happy childhood in which everything that happened to him was a treat to be looked forward to with ecstasy.” In the youth of C, otherwise Cyril Bramsley, there was nothing approaching the ecstatic except secret games of single wicket with the grooms, which he gave up because a neighbouring cricket-mad squire, having watched them a while unseen, urged his father to have C taught to keep a straight bat.

This incident throws a light on the boy's disposition. His home was unsympathetic to him, his mother disliked him, his character was what the French admirably call “*pas commode*,” that is, not always easy to deal with. Why some boys delight in concealing their tastes and aptitudes from the masters who are paid to teach them is difficult to understand; but C was that sort of boy.

Later on he developed a charm of which, without dwelling on it, the author makes us conscious, and with which his looks kept pace. Tall, rather sallow, with dark hair, and wonderful eyes full of dreams and passion, he reminds you of one of those haunting Bronzino three-quarter length portraits of “A Young Nobleman,” whose fate it will be to drift farther and farther from the land he is half-heartedly trying to reach. And one day he will give up the struggle and let the waves close over his head.

If, like certain characters in Dickens—Steerforth for instance—the figure of C is destined to become part of the permanent furniture of our minds, still more will it be so with Baring's “*Lesbia illa*,” Leila Bucknell, in whom he has executed an immortal picture of the worst type of woman that exists. Inevitable though it be, it is rather shocking to reflect that so long as they avoid causing indiscreet scandal—and thus far you can trust them!—beings who ought to be compelled by law to carry the lepers' bell enjoy the intimacy of really “nice” women, and rank among the chief ornaments of their parties!

But about very few things is opinion unanimous. Here is an amazing story which came to me on the best possible authority.

Soon after C appeared “Leila” was being discussed by some

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femmes du monde—who agreed that so wicked a character could have been produced by the Victorian epoch alone, and no longer existed. Upon which a Mrs. X who was present—a virtuous woman, happily married to an extremely respectable public servant—said that Leila was charming, and she would rather have been like her than anyone in fiction! And I myself remember that a certain lady professed to believe that she had been taken as model for Leila; and behind simulated indignation peeped out manifest satisfaction!

Few more living pictures can be found than here of the degrading, the hideously tragic side of so-called “love” (one hates using the word in such a connection), of its power to swamp every other faculty possessed by the victim. There are relatively tolerable forms of the disease. When, as in the Richepin ballad, a man cuts out his mother’s heart because his mistress wants it for her dog’s dinner, we can overlook it. Or again, in early days, when Mrs. Bucknell, who possessed the valuable art of producing real tears at will, did so just as the choir boys were squalling a hymn about suffering hearts and Christian resignation, one could forgive C for believing her to be a saint from heaven.

But when it comes to a really cultured man, who has had chances of gauging, from “beautiful lines” copied out by Leila in her letters, the exact level of her literary taste; when, I say, it comes to his writing poems for a dreadful little pink volume in which she entered her favourite verses and sentiments, then you groan in spirit. For you know that by the time those sealed eyes are opened he will be past praying for.

Such a woman enters the life of a weak, gullible fellow like C with a halo encircling a hat not paid for by the new man he is agonising about just now, but by a permanent, wholly unsuspected, elderly protector like “Uncle” Freddy Marriott, for whom, when he is in the offing, decks are cleared—(“such a dear friend of my mother’s!”). And when “Uncle Freddy” falls ill, and by what Leila calls an act of unexampled treachery marries his nurse, he is replaced by another universal provider. Even-

tually the lover's power to blind himself will wear out, and he will pass the rest of his life drifting round the lowest circle of Purgatory to the lilt of what Baring says is the shortest poem ever written—that agonised quatrain by Catullus beginning “I hate and love.”

All the side-dishes in this book are well served and full of flavour; for instance, *Burstall*, the first man to encourage C to go on writing, and *Malone*, who eventually marries his mistress whom he “hates like hell” yet cannot live without. In *Beatrice*, a deeply moving figure whom, but for *Lesbia illa*, C might one day have married, Baring has performed the miracle of creating a saint about whom is none of the boringness that generally hangs about saints in fiction—“Agnes” in *David Copperfield*, for instance. And here again, though I speak as the blind of colour, I believe Baring is true to life. A real saint has faults, no doubt, but I feel sure that being a bore is not one of them.

An inimitable sketch is that of *Mrs. Evelyn*, Leila Bucknell's great friend, with whom it is a point of honour that all men shall be in love with Leila; who holds a neat little Italian oil-can in readiness to feed the dying flame of Leila's too sorely-tried victims; and who meanwhile keeps her own admirer, Leila's husband, quiet and contented. Then there is *Sir Alfred Rooter*, the South African millionaire, who after the defection of “Uncle Freddy Marriott” steps into his shoes. Among the trials of poor Leila's life is that, unless one of her younger “amants de coeur” happens to be both rich and attractive (as was Beatrice's husband, FitzClare, annexed by Leila in Paris) the existence of the general provider has to be kept a secret from two or three other lovers. She is for ever hinting to C that her life is full of dark mysterious problems; but since, as Freddy Calhoun's French mistress remarked in poor C's hearing, there are never less than two or three men providing her with pin money, the troubles can't have been financial. So it must have been the fatigue of an everlasting game of hide and seek.

One of the most striking portraits in this gallery is that of C's

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elder brother *Gilbert*; and that he, the instrument of *C*'s final undoing, should not appear till the end of the book, and that when he does we cannot help liking him, are, I think, remarkable proofs of Baring's novelistic instinct. Gilbert Bramsley, the black sheep of the family, had vanished from the scene under a cloud when *C* was very young and his name was never mentioned. But when he comes back from ostracism in South Africa he is a millionaire, takes London by storm, and buys back the Bramsley estate from poor Sir Alfred Rooter, whom he had met in South Africa and whom he now gently and firmly manoeuvres back whence he came, significantly explaining to *C* that "you can't have two lions in one cage." Leila has secretly succumbed to Gilbert at first sight, and *C* has overheard Freddy Calhoun darkly hinting that "at last Mrs. Bucknell has met her match." Meanwhile Gilbert is very nice to *C*, evidently likes him, and announces his intention of looking after his future. Rather breathlessly we ask ourselves: "What next?"

The crisis comes almost immediately. *C* has been very ill, but tortured with apprehension, as soon as he can stand he gets out of bed, drives to Leila's house, passes the butler's guard, runs upstairs, opens the drawing-room door, and in a mirror catches sight of a tender passage between her and Gilbert. Instantly he perceives that not only is Gilbert the man in possession, but that, perhaps for the first time in her life, Leila is really in love. A few words are exchanged about *C*'s illness and Gilbert urges him to take his electric brougham and go back to bed at once. He goes and Gilbert remains.

This final disaster further loosens *C*'s weak hold on life. Only half-recovered he again falls ill, and is looked after by Beatrice, who is now a professional nurse. With the eyes of love she perceives that he is dying, and one is thankful she is there to see him over the border, while one of his sisters holds the door against all visitors. For many days he hovers between sleep and semi-consciousness, his rooms full of flowers sent by Leila, his table bestrewn with notes from her which he has neither strength nor desire to open. And gradually, without recovering full

consciousness, he finds what he had so often longed for . . . Death.

There is, alas, no deliberate recourse to comedy in this terribly sad book, though one comes across touches of humour here and there; the description of a gorgeously arrayed lady of a certain age, who moves across the room “like a tired peacock”; the characterisation of C’s diplomatic aunt and uncle who are so used to going into mourning for foreign royalties and diplomats that they have acquired a possessive air about mourning and death in general, and always do the honours at funerals. Brilliant and felicitous remarks abound, of course. We heard of a party at which the guests seem to have been “dealt from another pack of cards to those at last night’s party”; and there are phrases other people might have lit upon *but they haven’t*—such as “the physical pain of unhappiness”; also exquisite little scenes like the following, that will go to the heart of elderly women who remember being taken in their own girlhood to balls at which they knew no one. (In those days you didn’t go to balls, you were *taken* to balls!)

C, whose heart is almost breaking that night, catches sight of a distant cousin of his, a *débutante*, so pretty, so young, sitting solitary and melancholy next her aunt, an old lady with a high tiara. He asks her to dance, and when the dance is over takes her out into the garden. “How delicious it is!” she says, “I’d like to stay here all night!” Presently the music begins again and the girl leaps to her feet saying: “I’m dancing this!” . . .

C is admirably constructed and deeply interesting as story. But apart from that, it is rich in sudden incursions of the peculiar spirit that informs all Baring’s work; a spirit difficult to describe, though I made the attempt a few pages back, that connects the moment in which he and you are engrossed with something that happened long ago and saves from over-great preoccupation with the matter in hand; a touch that lets in the vast world of romance, joy, sorrow, and beauty that lies behind C or any other

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novel, and fills our lungs with fresh oxygen. I suppose that other novelists of culture—though few of them have culture such as Baring's—possess this art, but in Baring's case the art is concealed; these touches come in as naturally as the view that makes your heart beat suddenly at the turning of a mountain path.

I will give two instances to illustrate my meaning.

Sarah Bernhardt (for we know that *Madeleine Laparra* can be no other) is reciting at a *matinée* the terrible dream from Racine's *Athalie*. Jezebel's daughter describes what she saw in that dream . . . the vision of her mother, adorned and painted "pour réparer des ans l'irréparable outrage"; and as she spoke those words, Sarah suddenly seemed to grow one hundred years older, and C thought of Froude's description of the executioner holding up Mary Stuart's severed head, grown grey and suddenly that of an old woman at Fotheringay.

A few lines farther on there is another change. Sarah is now "the fallen Queen at bay, in all her borrowed youth, her malignant majesty, her evil glamour, turning and snarling defiance at the murderous pack, and finally defeated, pulled down, chewed and mangled; and he seemed to hear a human cry, drowned and stifled by a murderous merciless baying and yelping. The audience, he felt, were all of them in at the death, and they knew it. It was a hideous *ballade*, and the quarry was an old painted Queen."

I wonder whether there are many readers to whom this sudden allusion to Mary Stuart is not a stab in the heart. . . . "the physical pain" of a memory?

The other passage recounts a stray conversation that took place on a bench beside the Seine at Versailles between C and a stranger. The two were discussing Greek verse and saying that no verse has ever touched it. The stranger began quoting the scene where Priam goes to Achilles to ransom the body of Hector, giving first the Greek and then the translation: "But the words so stirred the heart of Achilles that he wept, thinking

now of Patroclus, now of his old father at home; and Priam wept, thinking of his dead Hector.”

“That is how Church translates it,” said Burstall, “in *Stories from Homer*, and as usual he does it best, only he leaves out one line:

‘And he touched the old man’s hand and gently moved him back.’”

Once more the stranger spoke the Greek lines, and as he did so he looked towards the lowering sunlight which was reflected and shone on the large window-panes of *Trianon*, and at the sky, which, for the first time that year, looked spring-like. It was lilac and green and the trees were soft and dewy. In the east great snowy, cold clouds were piled up one on another, “faintly reflecting the light in the West. A black-cap was singing somewhere. The stranger’s eyes filled with tears and there was a new light in them, and of the same quality as that of the evening sky. C felt they were for the moment on holy ground and that it was good for him to be there. So do great verse and the words of the mighty poets transfigure the semblance and the manner of ordinary mortals, for nothing could have been more prosaic than the appearance of the stranger.”

Presently the spell was broken. The stranger had to go, told C his name, gave him his address and went. This was C’s first meeting with *Andrew Burstall*, who, as was hinted, came to have a high opinion of his literary gifts and might have been a beneficent influence on his life. But once *Lesbia illa* appeared upon the scene, nothing else was to flower in that garden.

There is a passage in *Eckermann’s Conversations with Goethe* that is good reading for lesser mortals than Eckermann’s great patron.

“Every year” (said Goethe), “I make a point of reading something by Molière, and in the same way now and again I look at engravings of the works of great masters. We little people are incapable of storing up the greatness of such masterpieces,

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and are obliged to go back to them again and again to renew our impressions.”*

In Goethe's day there were no circulating libraries, nor were new novels appearing at the rate of a thousand a day; consequently he had more leisure than we have for turning back the leaves of Time. Whether Baring, who is ever haunted by great literature, realises that in constantly sending great shafts of light into the dim recesses of our memory he is doing for us what Goethe did for himself, I cannot say, but so it is. And though one dare not affirm that after coming across passages like the above, certain books are invariably pulled down from their shelves and studied, it not unfrequently happens! At any rate, he reminds us that, in spite of small worries, bills, physical deterioration, and the constant death of people you love, a healing well-spring of beauty is close at hand. And surely none but an ungrateful short-sighted fool would let his lips forget how to catch the drops as they fall.

* This from one whom foolish contemporaries accused of giving himself airs! Behind the stateliness demanded in those days of a great Minister, surely anyone ought to have detected the fundamental humility of all toweringly great men?

XXVII

"CAT'S CRADLE" (1925)

THE three novels of Baring's that weigh the heaviest—also in terms of avoirdupois—followed each other in quick succession. The second, *Cat's Cradle*, is planned on such an heroic scale that it is hopeless to do more than indicate the outline of the story. It begins at the moment when the heroine, Blanche Clifford, a charming débutante, is persuaded by her father Henry Clifford to break off a boy-and-girl engagement which could improbably have ended in marriage before both parties were grey-headed. After this, Henry Clifford, who is not unsympathetic but a thorough-paced worldling, further induces Blanche to marry another suitor, head of one of the oldest and most noble Italian families, towards whom her feeling of "respectful indifference" turns in the first year of their marriage into "cold, calm hatred" on discovering that his jealousy not only caused him to abstract from the hall-table letters addressed to her and burn them, but purposely to leave corners of the envelopes lying in the fender unburned, in order to show her what to expect if men who presume to admire her attempt correspondence.

Between Prince Guido Roccapalumba and his English mother, Princess Julia, Blanche's life was hell. The two had spies in every camp and contrived that she should never make a friend of her own. The way this surveillance is carried out, with what smiling semblance of affection on the part of her mother-in-law, is described with masterly and convincing detail.

At length, goaded to madness, Blanche agrees to elope with Prince Chiaramonte, a man for whom she cares less than nothing. But among Guido's gifts was an uncanny power of reading his

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wife's thoughts and intentions; and on the morning of the day on which the elopement was to have taken place, Blanche's maid rushed in to tell her that the Prince had had a seizure. Blanche sent a note to Chiaramonte cancelling all arrangements, and found Guido lying rigid, speechless, and apparently unconscious. . . .

Here the story is broken off. When it is resumed fourteen years later, we learn that although in other respects apparently quite well, Guido has never recovered the use of his limbs, and spends his days on the sofa—untiringly tended by his wife, and receiving selected visitors at tea-time.

The idea of this mysterious illness was probably suggested by the case of Vernon Lee's brother, who in early manhood suddenly and inexplicably became unable to walk. After a couple of decades of immobility, one day he got up, walked about, married, and begat children. But Vernon's brother was a gifted being not devoid of charm, whereas Guido is easily the most hateful creature one could meet in or outside a book.

The reader does not quite know what to think about this illness, but an Italian girl—a friend of Blanche's, who had once stayed in the house for a few days—believed, and she had reason for her belief, that Guido could walk if he chose. But she confided her suspicion to no one except her sister.

Thus the years passed, and Blanche could hardly be persuaded to leave the invalid. Without going through any particular religious crisis, without persuasion or pressure from anybody, she became a Roman Catholic. Then Bernard Lacy, member of an old English Catholic family, came to Rome, and he and Blanche fell deeply in love. Shortly afterwards, Princess Julia, who had divined the situation—so far a blameless one—fell ill and died. . . . One evening Bernard called, and for the first time found Blanche alone. In the growing dusk they sat in silence, motionless—now and then murmuring a word of love. Time and space vanished . . . a clock struck a quarter to twelve. It was past midnight when the door opened and in walked Guido, deathly pale, carrying an oil lamp. Formally he escorted Bernard

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to the stair head and went back to bed. Next day a deed of separation was drawn up, he resumed his recumbent life, and Blanche left the palace for ever.

Some years later Guido died, and Blanche married Bernard Lacy. She was aware that when one day he spoke of marriage, it was her cousin and ward, Rose Mary, penniless daughter of her father’s brother Charles Clifford, who was in his mind; but unable to give him up, she pretended to think it was herself, and Bernard, discovering to his astonishment that he was still passionately loved by this woman fifteen years older than himself, had not the heart to undeceive her. Rose Mary, a lovely girl of seventeen who detested Blanche, had secretly loved Bernard from the first, but now, mainly from pride, she accepted Bernard’s great friend, Walter Troumestre. Bernard had inherited a large property in England, and as Troumestre was badly off, to Blanche’s despair her husband persuaded the couple to establish themselves in his garden at the Dower House.

As time went on Bernard and Rose Mary fell more and more deeply in love with each other, and the tragedy moved slowly to its culmination, the death of Blanche. Troumestre, who one day had learned that his wife had never loved him, that she and Bernard had always cared for each other, and for one brief period had even been lovers, goes out to the Balkans and dies there. Bernard and Rose Mary eventually marry of course, and the book ends just where the curtain is being rung up for the Great War.

* * * * *

No title could better describe a story the course of which was determined by a first kiss. “At that moment,” says the author, “the thread of Bernard’s life crossed and caught that of Blanche’s; and the finger of destiny, with a sudden deft movement, changed the pattern in the Cat’s Cradle of their lives.” But I should like to say something about the chief characters in this book, which has the curious quality of casting a fresh light on itself every

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time you read it, and I must have read it four or five times at least.

As regards the hero, I account for him by remembering Baring's unconquerable fidelity to truth. Having studied the incomprehensibility of mortals when in the grip of love, he is content to make of Bernard a mere façade, whose sole asset—at least until he inherits two titles and two properties—seems to be a pair of rather sad grey eyes. (At one moment I perceived a certain charm in him, but it has now evaporated.)

Turning to Rose Mary, at first I could not believe in her at all. But to-day she pervades the tragedy consistently and convincingly, and I think it was merely that this curious blend of physical beauty and moral detestableness (crossed by one single virtue, honesty) is too original, too startling to be at once accepted without demur. One felt like the man, who, when he saw a giraffe for the first time, exclaimed: "But there ain't no such animal!"

Blanche is Baring's first full-length portrait of a woman—in the sense that instead of coming into the story one day, like Mrs. Bucknell, and changing the course of a man's life, the whole book is built round her. And because from the first she seems to have believed it was her fate to bring misery and unhappiness to others; and above all in view of her magnificent final *mea culpa*—so touching, so magnificent, and which I shall quote presently, for in it is the core of Baring's philosophy—I feel impelled to take up the cudgels for this most unhappy woman.

Until the day she succumbed to temptation and practically forced Bernard to marry her (and God knows that act was expiated) what crime had she committed? If she gave up her first love, it was because her father insisted that by holding on to their engagement she was ruining the youth's career in India (whither crafty relatives had sent him). If she married Guido Roccapalumba without loving him, here again terrific pressure was brought to bear upon her by her father and by Guido's

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mother; and after all no one knew that Guido was a potential devil, and that in his fury at realising that Blanche would never love him, whereas one or two other men appeared to have charm for her, he and his mother would leave nothing undone to punish her. Again, if the egregious Rose Mary declares that Blanche robbed her of her father, it was at some sacrifice to herself that Blanche went to look after this widowed, utterly helpless uncle who had implored her to come to his aid. Also, as Rose Mary was still at her convent school, there was no one else available.

Certainly Blanche attracted men, but one cannot see that the love agonies of her two first victims—Valefsky, who died of a combination of love and tuberculosis, and Adrian Tyne, who consoled himself later on—were her fault. A born *charmense* cannot but welcome love and admiration—(as do those who, without possessing the Helen gift, get a crumb or two of it here and there!). And one should remember that in exercising this gift the *charmense* is yielding to the impulsion of her genius.

But in a really serious case, that of the scholarly and pagan Bretherton, who had never made love to her, whose friendship was a delight to this lonely woman, and of whom the uncannily shrewd Guido was consequently jealous, she gave him up at her husband’s command, and what more could she have done?

A priest whom she privately consulted on this point, asking him if such tyranny and unreasonableness should be yielded to, seemed to know something about Bretherton’s past and considered him to be a dormant rather than an extinct volcano; consequently he backed up Guido. Blanche had begun by admitting that she ought never to have married him, but she now asked whether she was therefore bound to make her life into a desert? The priest replied that she would find wells of water in that desert that nothing can excel; and the remark was admirable and to the point. But when he adds that, far from acting unreasonably and tyrannically, the line taken by Guido

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proved him to be "far-seeing and fond," one cannot help wondering if priests are quite invariably such founts of wisdom as the faithful represent them to be! Anyhow, the result of this consultation was that Blanche became desperate, and for the first time in her life went in for deliberate flirtation; hence the decision to elope and all that followed.

To take a long step into the second part of her life, from the moment she jockeys Bernard into marrying her, she loses our sympathy, and also appears to do everything best calculated to alienate him. Haunted perennially by the thought that she is over forty and he not yet thirty, she harps on her age and makes scenes of jealousy; in fact Blanche becomes a bore. Those who knew them both well, sometimes wondered at her infatuation for Bernard . . . but of course love is like that, and there is nothing more to be said. Yet Walter Troumestre, who, living next door, fell into the habit of consulting her over every page of his travel-cum-political books, though in love with no one but his own wife, considered Bernard strangely unconscious of the privilege of possessing such a being as Blanche. But then he didn't know about the scenes.

Again, when two young men fall madly in love with her, nice Lady Lawless—the same who appears in Baring's play *His Majesty's Embassy*—tells her these things are "always the woman's fault"; but in these cases I cannot see that Blanche had anything to reproach herself with. In fact I think that the author himself is a little hard on her; and speaking as critic, one's only real complaint is that we are constantly told she is "amusing" and such "good company," but cannot find one line in the book that corroborates these statements!

This is perhaps part of Baring's method of leaving a good deal to our imagination, once he has indicated the line he wishes it to take; which after all was the system of the author of the first chapter of *Genesis*, who announced one creative act after another, merely stating that it was satisfactory. Only one can't help judging some of these authoritative pronouncements by

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the sequel—wondering, for instance, whether all the creative efforts catalogued in *Genesis* were as “good” as they seemed to their creator, more particularly in the reptile department. And by the same token I cannot believe that *Blanche’s* amusingness was really amusing.

It cannot be denied that this is another very sad book. But one little drop of comfort Baring gives us: at the very end of the story we possess the happy certainty that at least one of *Blanche’s* cruellest enemies, *Rose Mary*, will get what she deserves.

As I said, the Great War is all but on them. The reservists, among them *Bernard*, are sure to be called up, pending which event he and *Rose Mary* are in London, and at a dance. *Bernard* is seated at a small table in the supper-room beside a beautiful, extremely finished-looking person with soft violet eyes and long lashes, who is looking down and listening to him with grave and wrapped interest.

“I can’t see who that is with *Bernard*,” remarks someone to the diplomatist, *Napier*.

“It’s *Mrs. Bucknell*,” *Napier* said.

“*Leila*?”

“Yes.”

“Is she as pretty as ever?”

“Just.”

“She has never been a friend of *Bernard’s*, has she?”

“No, not yet that I know of.”

* * * * *

Closing *Cat’s Cradle* one recalls a remark of *Mr. Desmond MacCarthy’s* quoted in the Introduction to Part III of this study—that for him the value of certain books lies in the depth of the author’s “response to life.” Nowhere does Baring respond more deeply and richly than in this novel, and, as usual, I cannot refrain from giving instances.

Here is a scene *Blanche* never forgot—her initiation into the life of the humbler Roman streets; a scene which, in a flash of

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mingled delight and longing, will penetrate the heart of anyone who has been happy in Rome . . . and who probably will never go there again.

She is rambling along a narrow street; in front of her paces a donkey laden with vegetables, whose owner is "helping him along with encouraging noises." In an upper storey someone is playing on a clattering pianoforte the drinking song from Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*. . . . It is divinely gay, and she remembers a party at her father's house in Curzon Street which she had been allowed to come down to as a small child, just so that in after-life she should be able to say she had heard Mario.

"A loaded wine-cart now came rumbling by. A dignified looking peasant was sitting sideways on the edge of it, near the shut hood which sprawled over the side like a sail with its pattern of pink roses (like those on a Pompeian mosaic) and lining of green cretonne. He opened his throat and sang the phrase of a song:

'O Rosa delle rose, O Rosa bella,
Per te non dormo ne notte ne giorno-o-o-o-o'

The contrast with the gay music of the pianoforte, which had now stopped, was sharp. This phrase seemed to come from another century, from another world. . . . It seemed to Blanche like the fragment of a chant, but oh! so old and so far away. Proserpine might have listened to just such a snatch of song when she was picking flowers in the vale of Enna. The singer prolonged the last note of his phrase till his breath failed him, and the song died away in a discordant blurred chromatic. It was deafeningly loud, nasal, and at the same time hoarse and piercingly sad. A dog, that was sprawling over one of the barrels barked. . . ."

The cart rumbled on, and for one brief moment silence seemed to descend upon the city and the street, but only to be broken immediately.

"All at once the church bells began to ring. Blanche seemed to be in a crystal kingdom of ringing sound. The man behind

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the donkey stopped and took off his hat. It was the *Ave Maria*: Small groups of men and women who were sitting and standing at the doorways, talking in a loud chatter, some singing, some knitting, all stopped doing what they were doing and were silent. Hardly had the *Angelus* ceased ringing when Blanche heard the sound of another bell. In the distance of the dark street she saw lighted torches waving and coming towards her as if in a hurry. And the sound of many voices—that peculiar, rhythmical, almost mechanical unison of voices praying. A great hush descended upon that street, which was swarming with so intense, vivid, coloured, and loud a life. Blanche heard the people crying: ‘Il Santissimol Il Santissimol’ Those who were indoors snatched lamps from the table—lamps as old in shape as those of the Vestal Virgins, or the Wise and the Foolish Virgins—and the whole street was bright with a sudden spontaneous illumination.

“It was a priest bearing the Blessed Sacrament to a sick man to give him the Viaticum. Beside him was a boy ringing a bell and bearing a tall lighted taper. A carriage came clattering down the street at that moment; the coachman stopped, and a lady, dressed in black, got out and knelt down while the little procession passed.”

They turned up another little street; on each side of them was a kneeling crowd. Arrived at the house of the sick man, a few followed the priest into it . . . others stayed outside; some of them said the Rosary, others the Litany for the dying. . . . Soon the priest came out, again the little procession formed; once more lamps were held in doorways and out of windows, and again the street was illuminated; this time Blanche let the procession pass and turned into the street that led her home to the Palazzo Fabrini.

As with everyone who for the first time sees this scene, it remained indelibly printed in Blanche’s memory, and came back to her when Rose Mary’s father was dying. Seldom as we catch sight of him, her uncle Charles Clifford is one of the memorable figures, and the scene of his death one of the most beautiful scenes, in the book. Unworldly, unpractical, feckless, an artist

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to the finger-tips, and a gifted one, he had always lacked the power of work and concentration without which talent is useless. And he had crowned the follies of his life—so his relations put it—by marrying a splendid Spanish peasant, Mercedes by name, with whom he had lived in perfect bliss for many years and from whose death he had never recovered. They had lived at Seville; bereft of her, he went for a while to England . . . and now Blanche had taken him back to Seville to die.

It may be remembered that Baring refers somewhere to a supreme moment in Duse's acting, when, in an Ibsen play, a man the recollection of whom had always haunted her with a sort of terror, and whom everyone but she believes to be dead, suddenly walks into the room. She evinced no surprise, and those who saw her in that part remember how with one quietly-spoken word "*Ecco-ti!*"* she conveyed the fact that her life had been lived in expectation of this moment.

In days gone by Charles Clifford and Mercedes had seen her in that play; now

"he lay in bed with a rosary in his hand, looking straight in front of him. All at once he smiled and said '*Ecco-ti!*', and he hummed very softly and exquisitely the phrase of a Spanish song, *Tú me dejaste solito*.† Then he shut his eyes, and an inscrutable peace and final content seemed to stream from the calm of his face, which was now quiet for ever."

Either of these "responses to life" might be expressed in music or painting, but in no medium could they be more perfect as works of art than in the prose of this poet.

The last specimen I shall give of what lies between the covers of *Cat's Cradle* was quoted in the *Quarterly* article, but I think it will bear repetition here.

Towards the end of the book a newcomer had stepped on to

* "Here you are!"

† "You leave me a little lonely."

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the stage, Bessie, wife of Bernard’s younger brother Stephen, whom a slip out in India had compelled to marry this rather pretty, very second-rate, and most malignant woman whom he hated. Frantic at the deference and attention paid by her husband to Blanche, Mrs. Stephen, who has a private grudge of her own against Bernard, determines, as vengeance, to write a letter which shall “open Blanche’s eyes.” Blanche had known for years that her husband had ceased to love her, and was also aware of his infidelity; but her one comfort had been the belief that, anyhow, she had been the supreme love of his existence. She now learns that this was an illusion, and in the crumbling together of the whole edifice of her life—past, present and future—a terrible light reveals to her how that life had really been lived. For the first time she realises that the hidden spring of her every action had been love of self, even in cases where, humanly speaking, it seemed as if no reproach could be levelled against her. She now knows, at last, how and where she has failed; and with the revelation, at the impact of the bitter truth, every remnant of selfish longing for love, of jealousy of those who drew, and will yet draw to themselves, her husband’s passion, falls away from her for ever.

“All her life she had made herself unhappy, and others happier still. Would it go on thus till she died? ‘O no! not that, dear God!’ And then, kneeling down, she prayed to be saved from herself for what remained of her life; prayed that she might do no further harm, cause no further unhappiness, and scalding tears poured down her cheeks. And it was then that the wound caused by the whole situation pierced her soul, and as it pierced it, it healed it. The poison suddenly left it, the venom disappeared. It was as if God had suddenly touched Bessie’s poisoned arrow, and without lessening its power and pain had changed the nature of it, and left instead of it balm—a sense of medicine and healing and peace. Blanche felt at that moment that for the rest of her life she would be able to sacrifice herself. She knew now that from henceforth she never would grudge Bernard his love for another; she would be able to live without

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help, without friends, without love. . . . And from this act of inner self-sacrifice and renunciation she had made came balm, just as hitherto, from every act of self-indulgence had come a sense of scorching ashes. *'Entbehren sollst du—sollst entbehren.'** She had often said the words to herself, but now for the first time with her heart. Thus it was" (adds the author) "that Bessie wounded and healed Blanche's soul."

* "Thou shalt renounce . . . renounce."

XXVIII

"DAPHNE ADEANE"—"TINKER'S LEAVE"—"COMFORTLESS
MEMORY"

"DAPHNE ADEANE" (1926)

It is with *Daphne Adeane* that Baring finally captured his French public. English readers, who had previously been immersed in *C* and *Cat's Cradle*, felt—and on re-perusing the book I still feel—that the author had become slightly hypnotised by a certain type of matrimonial duet which certainly is a familiar one—a husband who is unable to respond in kind to his wife's devotion. Luckily there are other types, only you don't always meet them in Baring's novels!

In the case of Michael Choyce, hero of this book, the legal partner of his life had been preceded by one of the most charming of Baring's charmers, Hyacinth Wake, who, though still passionately attached to her lover, had brought their liaison to an end; firstly because she believed her husband harboured suspicions and was unhappy about it, secondly because it was time for Michael to marry and build up what everyone expected would be a brilliant future. Fanny Weston, the wife chosen for him by a worldly-wise and much attached aunt, fell in love with him at first sight, but ere long his kindly indifference, and her slowly-won knowledge that he had loved and had never ceased loving Hyacinth, did their work in her heart. She bore two children, but the confinements were difficult; her spirits, her health and, worst of all, her looks, began to suffer, and Michael wondered what had become of the girl that, at one moment, it had seemed quite possible to fall in love with by and by.

Follows a prolonged spell of married felicity—so we say in

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our petulance—à la Maurice Baring. She loves gardens and gardening, but he is convinced she doesn't care about country life; he adores music, but she is persuaded that it bores him. According to the Baring gospel, someone else's wife often knows instinctively, before she and her future lover have ever met at a tea-table, that he likes two lumps of sugar in his tea; but a wife can apparently believe for fifteen years on end that her husband cannot bear even one lump.

Eventually, loved and admired by men who were not her husband, Fanny recovered in treble measure the charms that at first had mildly attracted Michael. And now, for the first time, he falls in love with her . . . too late!

This, then, is the accredited matrimonial setting; but as the book moves on you discover that its core is a most original and convincing conception, in that it is dominated by a woman who is no longer in this world.

We meet her first at a Private View in the shape of a portrait executed shortly before her death two or three years ago by the painter Henriquez, one of the men—for we gather there were others—who had died of love for Daphne Adeane. A mysterious, gifted, and fascinating créole, she had also been loved by two men who come into this story, the painter Leo Dettrick, and later by a nerve specialist of genius, Doctor Francis Greene. Concerning her sentimental life opinions differed, one friend maintaining that she had been "crazily in love" with Leo Dettrick, another that Francis Greene was the one passion of her life. Meanwhile each of the men (they were great friends) was convinced that whether she might or might not in time reward his own flame, she not only cared nothing at all for his friend but neither did *he* care for *her*—convictions that doubtless account for the smooth course of their friendship!

What her nice adoring husband, Robert Adeane, had thought of this all-round playing with fire we are not told. But when, shortly before the Great War, Fanny made the acquaintance of Leo Dettrick, and began to depend on his friendship and admira-

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tion (or was it *amitié amoureuse*?), she found herself dreading the influence, and actively disliking the idea of the dead Daphne, who in one terrifying nightmare had shut her up in a room, accusing her of having robbed her of both her lovers. This, although, in Fanny’s opinion, Leo was not in the least in love with her, and though she had so far never set eyes on Francis Greene!

Then war breaks out, and Michael joins the air force. Despairing of winning back Fanny’s love, he hopes a bullet may be the way out of the dilemma, while Fanny goes to France with the Red Cross. There at last she meets Francis Greene; and perhaps Daphne’s accusation came back to her mind, for almost instantly she and Francis fell in love with each other. Hardly was their passion implemented than news came that Michael was “missing.” . . .

When the war was over, it being by now practically certain that Michael was dead, Francis and Fanny decided to marry, and were actually drafting the announcement for *The Times* when a wire arrived from Belgium saying that her husband was alive and well. It was signed “Basil Wake,” widower of the Hyacinth whom Michael had loved. He and Mr. Adeane had met in France over Red Cross work, and in the course of trying to recover traces of “missing” men had found Michael, who had been hidden for three years in a Belgian convent. He had crashed hard by, had burned his machine and all his papers, and then, succumbing to concussion, had been unable to remember his name or give any clue to the kindly nuns as to his identity. But it appeared that directly he had seen Wake he exclaimed: “Hullo, Basil!”, and in a second recovered his lost past.

Such was the story Fanny learned later on. The telegram merely stated that, for reasons which would be explained personally, Basil Wake was escorting Michael to Calais where they would stay a day or two, while Mr. Adeane was crossing alone to England and would call on Fanny as soon as he arrived.

Stunned by the news, Francis and Fanny sat hand in hand

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like two frightened children who have been threatened that a bad fairy will come and separate them. They argued the situation to and fro, Fanny declaring that even if, on learning what had happened, her husband were willing to take her back, nothing would induce her to renounce Francis. . . . But Francis had to hurry back to the hospital; and when he left, promising to dine with her later, nothing was decided. Yet both felt secretly that a shadow had fallen on their love. . . . "Will he *want* to marry me now?" Fanny asked herself. . . .

She must discuss the matter with someone, but with whom? Distraught she walked into the Park and by chance came across a priest she had met in France and both liked and respected. She was not a Roman Catholic—not even a Christian—but she felt that more than all her friends and acquaintances she would like to consult Father Stanway.

His advice was uncompromising; she must break with her lover and go back to her husband. And when she pleaded that the real tie between her and Michael—the only tie—had been her honesty, that when he knew all he probably would be unwilling to take her back, the priest replied (and I find his verdict startling, though possibly sound) that her expiation must be . . . *silence!* On that they parted, and Fanny went home, her intention shaken but not deflected. She wrote a farewell letter to Michael but did not post it, and sat brooding over the fire, waiting for Francis.

At six-thirty the door-bell rang; the maid brought up a card on which was printed "Mr. R. Adeane," and almost simultaneously Francis 'phoned to say someone wished to see him on an *urgent* matter so he could not dine with her, but would look in if possible before dinner. In any case next morning early, for certain.

The explanation Mr. Adeane had spoken of turned out to be, that probably owing to the shock of recovered memory, her husband, who at first had been wild with joy at the thought of taking the boat at Calais, had suddenly declared when they arrived there that he could not go home. Neither of the men

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knew anything about the domestic life of the Choyces, but both felt that the only person who could overcome this “nervous reluctance,” as he called it, was Fanny. Perhaps she would send him a message? suggested Mr. Adeane. He meanwhile had wired to an old friend, a great nerve specialist, asking if he might call that night and consult him. With a sinking heart Fanny learned that the specialist’s name was Francis Greene; but Adeane seemed pleased to find the two were friends, and promised to let her know the result of their interview. Fanny let him go under the impression that she would write to Michael; he and Francis Greene met on her doorstep and went together to Adeane’s house.

The scene between them is one of Baring’s masterpieces. The house had been left exactly as it was when Daphne died; this, the first reunion between the two friends since her death, evoked ghosts, and Francis could hardly believe he himself was alive. They discussed Michael’s case; also his strange obsession that his wife might regret his having come to life again, and Adeane impressed upon the doctor that he must be freed from it as soon as possible; also that Mrs. Choyce must be got into the right frame of mind for receiving her husband (he said she had seemed to him more in need of a doctor than he). Then Adeane led him into Daphne’s room where hung the Henriquez portrait, and, overcome, left him abruptly.

The picture seemed to be alive. It was Daphne herself looking at him, and speaking to him with gentle reproach:

... “You have not forgotten me,” the picture seemed to say, “your old, old friend! You are not going to leave me—to play me false?” And the past came back to Francis with a thousand scents and sights and sounds—echoes, words, tunes, accents, phrases, jokes—and he knew that his heart was there, that never could he feel once more what he had felt then. He seemed to himself like a man in a dream . . . like Siegfried when he had recovered from the potion that had made him forget Brünnhilde. He told himself that he loved Fanny as much as ever, but that

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it could no longer be as it had been before; the ghost of Daphne would be for ever between them.

"No, Daphne," he said, "I shall not forget you any more. I am sorry I forgot you for a while and played you false."

He promised Adeane to see Mrs. Choyce early next day, and Adeane was to send on to him a letter he expected from Wake; and so the two men parted.

When Francis and Fanny met next day she felt that something had happened to him beyond the new development in their joint drama; "Daphne Adeane has taken him away from me," she said to herself, "and small blame to her!" In one way this bitter thought made things easier, for her decision was already taken and she was glad that now she would no longer have to fight Francis about the future. She had cabled to Michael that she and their boy Peter would be at Victoria that evening to meet him. Without many words she and Francis understood each other; he took her in his arms and they whispered good-bye in one last kiss.

The scene at the station that evening is strangely moving.

When the train arrived there was the usual crowd of people. . . . Then Fanny caught sight of Michael—Michael in odd ready-made clothes, a *complet* bought off a peg at Calais. He looked well and no older, but thinner—"so thin, as if he had been through a great deal . . . and he was lame . . . he limped; his eyes were not unhappy . . . but meek . . . there was something piteous about him. He looked like a child who has been too long at school without a holiday, and starved physically and mentally—not only of food but of love. . . . Fanny felt a great rush of pity when she saw him, and when he ran to her and put his arms round her, and kissed her over and over again, she felt that she could now love him and protect him as a mother protects her son. . . ."

In fact, one ventures to hope that this time Baring has been tricked by an unexpected wile of his genius into opening up

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a new prospect before us—the prospect of a marriage that at all events became a happy one in the end; “For this relief, much thanks.” Meanwhile those who have not been brought up in the school of Father Stanway cannot help hoping that some day Fanny may see her way to make a clean breast of the Francis interlude!

“TINKER’S LEAVE” (1927)

Much space has been devoted to Baring’s first four novels, because, without quoting from them liberally, it is difficult to give an idea of what the present writer considers perhaps their chief distinction—the immense wealth of beauty that lies scattered over their pages. Once this has been demonstrated, new readers will easily believe that so it is throughout; and instead of doing Baring the doubtful service of rewriting all his novels for him, the rest of his output will be cursorily dealt with, and intensive examination reserved for what seems especially significant.

Tinker’s Leave does not come in this category; indeed, while recently (1937) correcting the proofs of the French translation, the author declared he couldn’t imagine the book appealing to the general public. “For me,” he wrote, “it has an extraordinary effect as containing a host of things which I had quite forgotten, and which were recorded as I wrote the book by a kind of Planchette. . . . But I do not think it can interest others.”

One cannot help sharing this feeling. Everything in *Tinker’s Leave* is obviously true to life. The incredible disjointedness of Russian existence, the everlasting drifting, the smell of rotting leaves and of fried beans, the wonderful sunsets and so on; but impressions like these are not enough to make a book. As for one of the points that interest the author—an “almost unbowlerized” account of what happened to a certain battery on the first night of the battle of Liao-Yang, and a full description of various things “only just hinted at” in his story of the Manchurian Campaign, I think we laymen are given all we ask and

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need in his Russian books—and above all in that wonderful story *The Flute of Chang Liang*.*

But three other points may arrest readers who admire this author too much to skip any of his work.

Firstly: the portrait of *Alyosha*—a male figure so Russian that you begin by feeling like one who, not knowing the language, is suddenly confronted by a page of Russian script. But you end by admiring the skill that has made Alyosha not only credible but lovable.

Secondly: the interminable conversations, desultory and wide in scope, that rage during endless train journeys between the various war correspondents. You feel convinced that the talk really was like that, at least if Baring was one of the travellers; and it is not everyone who can turn himself into a gramophone.

Thirdly: the following little duologue between an Englishman and a Russian (who, as he was dying, could safely speak his mind about Dumas and such-like) soothes the conscience of those among us who have always harboured a sneaking admiration for the present Russian government.

"But do you mean to say," asked the Englishman in 1905, "that the only result of a revolution here would be to have another despotism?"

"Of course!" replied the sick man. "Russia will either be governed by despotism or not at all. 'Despotism, or Time of Trouble' is the formula of Russian history."

"Then you think there will never be constitutional government?"

"I hope not—and I don't think so!"

"COMFORTLESS MEMORY" (1928)

This is one of the most curious books Baring has written; a tale, the wild improbability of which—even when, as here, the most improbable scene of all is left out—would apparently

* *Half a Minute's Silence*.

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debar it from exercising a lasting fascination. Yet one can affirm that any admirer of Baring's art will take up this little book again and again.

The plot bases on as monstrous a plan of campaign as can ever have issued from a presumably sound brain, and the luckless personages involved were the following:

(1) Horace, a successful writer; middle-aged, attractive and devoted to his wife, but nevertheless author of the plan.

(2) Theresa, his wife, handsome in the style (one imagines) of the Venus of Milo, wise, loving, and deeply distrustful of the plan, the nature of which she half suspects.

(3) Charles, a young painter of great promise, to whom the above couple are devoted, looking on him *quasi* as their property.

(4) Jenny True, a fascinating young widow who since her husband's death had lived at Naples with a fairly elderly adorer who couldn't marry her because he had a wife in a lunatic asylum. He had died a few years ago and left Jenny well off.

Now for the story. The scene is laid in Naples. Charles has been persuaded by Horace and Theresa to fly from the distracting influences of London and join them in their Neapolitan villa, where a painter should have every inducement to work. The result is that he falls madly in love with Jenny (whom he places on the loftiest of pedestals and who laughs at him as a silly boy) and of course works less than ever.

His friends are in despair. Then Horace has a brain-wave; "I will make love to her myself," he thinks, "and if I win her will say to Charles: 'There you see, she is a light woman, ready to go all lengths with a man whom she doesn't care two straws about, just because he is a celebrity of sorts.' Whereupon Charles will be cured, turn from Jenny in disgust, and go back to his easel." (Patience, reader! there is worse madness to come!)

Need one say the plan miscarries? Jenny who, though non-moral, is at heart the reverse of a light woman and altogether adorable, falls deeply in love with Horace; then, finding out that

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his love-making was a sort of game, she breaks with him. By this time Horace has discovered what was clear to his wife all along—that though unaware of it he had been in love with Jenny from the first. In vain he tells her that so it was, that he now loves her with all his heart and soul, and implores for mercy. His action, and the conception of her character that underlay it, have not only killed her love but given her a wound of which she dies.

Charles, maddened by rage and grief, curses Horace, and never again sets eyes on him or his wife; but in the end he recovers his genius and becomes a great painter. Horace achieves a certain distinction in the public service, but, whether or no as result of the curse, such literary gift as he once possessed wilts away, and he never again writes a book worth reading.

To refrain from even hinting at the heart-rending, most exquisitely related finale of this drama demands an effort; but the book is short, and whoever takes it up will not close it till the last page has been reached. After that, as hinted above, in most cases it will, I fancy, occupy a niche in the reader's mind from which Time will not dislodge it. The psychology is delicate and unerringly perceived; even more than the usual amount of beauty lurks in every page, and, above all, through the whole texture of this fantastically improbable tale runs the golden thread of magic.



G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, and Maurice Baring.

XXIX

"THE COAT WITHOUT SEAM" (1929)

THIS—one of the most perfect of Baring's novels—is the story of a man whom his friends no doubt described as his own worst enemy. Indeed, it is no mean feat of Baring's to make us perceive the charm of one so perverse, so touchy, so wrong-headed, in a word so *mis-stitched*, that all the time (as I ventured to say elsewhere) one longs to throw things at him. None the less we are not in the least surprised at his inspiring passions.

There is surely nothing truer than the German proverb: "As you call into the forest, so will the forest answer you," and the following are instances of the sort of "call" Christopher Trevenen was wont to send echoing down the aisles of any wood through which his path led him.

When he was at the University, being very poor he was obliged during the vacation to accept a tutorship in a perfectly delightful aristocratic Austrian family. He and the Countess's young daughter, Alex, fell in love with each other, and one evening he overheard the widowed lady of the house saying to her sister-in-law: "Imagine my husband's face at the idea of letting Alex [her daughter] marry Karl's tutor!" Whereupon Christopher outrageously insulted the two elderly ladies, who really liked him, and departed in a rage.

Again, when he was at Oxford, a man called Lawless, who did not know Christopher and had never heard about the Austrian interlude, remarked of someone who was suggested as possible member of their inner-circle club: "O, *he* won't do! He coached my younger brother in the vac. and never washed!" Whereupon, persuaded that this remark was aimed at him, Christopher

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conceived a wild hatred of Lawless—a hatred which had deplorable consequences by and by.

Again, when the daughter of a man who had engaged him as private secretary mentioned tennis on the first day he arrived and never asked him whether he played or not, Christopher took this as proof that these really charming people considered him their social inferior; on which assumption he methodically warded off all their attempts to make a friend of him and decided to adopt the line of "self-respecting paid servant." And when they introduced interesting people to him, to their puzzlement and distress he shut up like an oyster. "Queer chap," said the offending Lawless one day to Christopher's friend Suckling; "rather difficult, isn't he?" And Suckling had to allow it was true, but added that he was "worth while."

His brain was brilliant, and as life went on many chances came his way, but he seemed to take pleasure in queering his own pitch. Sometimes this was owing to generous impulses in one who was prone to espouse unpopular causes, yet in certain remarks of his Russian friend *Yakovlev* was the real core of the matter. "I admire," he said, "people who sacrifice something for an idea, but I am not sure whether your nature can bear the consequences. Your ideas spring from rage and are spurred by reaction, and so may easily turn to sourness instead of balm. You will always be too angry. If you had some religion all would be different."

But Christopher had no religion, was not even "religious" (which is a slightly different thing), and the nail was hit on the head by the same friend on another occasion: "If only," he said, "you would not think about yourself so much and a little more about other people."

Before pursuing Christopher Trevenen's fate any farther, a mysterious and beautiful theme must be indicated that contrapuntally crosses and blends with his life-line throughout. It concerns what from earliest times has been a subject of awed and palpitating interest in the Christian Church—the ultimate fate of

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the Coat without Seam for which, after Our Lord's Crucifixion, the Roman soldiers cast lots.

Its first appearance in Christopher's life was as follows. His father, a Northern Irishman and well-known savant, had married a Frenchwoman of good family who was a devout Catholic, and a year after their marriage he joined the Roman Church. During the summer they had for years been in the habit of renting a house at Vernay in North France near Mrs. Trevenen's old home. Christopher had at once made friends with the Curé, who dined with them every Sunday and loved children. One day when he was ten years old he strolled into the church at his mother's request in order to put up a candle to Our Lady as a thanksgiving for the recovery of his little sister Mabel, who had nearly died of pneumonia but was now said to be out of danger. There he met the Curé who helped him to put up the candle, and then knelt down with him, and they said a prayer together. After which the Curé showed him the *trésor* of the church, which consisted of beautiful old vestments and chalices, and said he must come to his house and have a *baba* before he went home.

On the way out they passed a chapel where, over the altar, there hung a faded piece of reddish-brown fabric in a frame. Christopher asked what it was; and presently, in the presbytery garden, where fruit hung heavily on the walls and flowers blazed, they sat down at a table; the Curé's old servant Amalie brought a bottle of blackcurrant wine, and some *babas* (which are cakes flavoured with rum) and the Curé told him one of the many legends concerning the fate of the Coat without Seam. The piece of fabric he had noticed was a holy relic, but not, as had been believed for many years, a fragment of the Coat. One of the churches at Trèves possessed what was considered a genuine fragment, the Curé said, and there was another church in France that made the same claim.

Three different legends concerning the Holy Coat—all three of great beauty—play a part in this book, and in each case the

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working of the relic, whether as healing the sick or preventing a crime, had been of miraculous beneficence. But each time that, by the merest chance, Christopher comes across one of these legends, some great sorrow befalls him immediately afterward. This, the first occasion of all, heralded the first tragedy that darkened his young life, for that night his little sister had a relapse and died.

About this book hovers the same gracious spirit that went to the making of its predecessor, *Comfortless Memory*, and that is, perhaps, why we have patience with Christopher's megrims. The brief and of course futureless love story between him and the Austrian Countess's daughter Alex, has the exquisite early morning quality we associate with the words *Paul et Virginie*, without putting it to the severe test of reading the book itself. There is no money, and members of the Austrian aristocracy increase and multiply on lines as rigid as those of royalty or race-horses; but all that is of no account to the young lovers. A day or two before his return to England they decide to tell her Mama they are engaged, and wonder how they can bear the impending separation. "When you walk on the terrace after dinner," says he, "you will think of me, won't you?" "I will go out on to the terrace every evening at nine," answers Alex, "and if there is a moon I will say, 'Herr Mond, please greet my heart's love'; and if there is no Herr Mond I will say, 'Little stars, please be kind enough to do my commission for me,' and if there are no stars I will ask the sky, and if it is raining I will ask the lamp. And I will pray every evening to Saint Christopher, because he is your patron saint, isn't he?"

Christopher was not quite sure about that, and she told him there was another Saint Christopher who died a martyr's death in Hungary; and taking out a copy she had made from a beautifully illustrated old manuscript of the story they read it together, and it turned out to be interwoven with a Hungarian version of the Holy Coat legend.

"It is strange," said Christopher, "that this story should crop

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up in my life again. The first time it was before something very sad.”

“This time it will be the contrary,” said Alex. “I think that something wonderful is going to happen to us.” Alas! next day the engagement was kindly but firmly nipped in the bud, and Christopher went back to England . . . once more at a loose end.

Some time later on he became private secretary to Sir Joseph Claydon, a man intimately connected with public life and owner of a superb library which it was one of Christopher’s duties to look after. (This was the house in which he proudly determined to take the line of “conscientious paid servant.”) Here he fell in love with a girl who came to stay there, Esther, daughter of a potentate in English music—a sort of Hubert Parry—and she herself was held to be a pianist with a very great future before her. No objection was made by her parents to the idea of her marrying Christopher, only there could be no question of engagement till after her first public appearance, which was to be some months hence at Berlin.

The day before she and her parents came back from Berlin, Christopher, browsing in the library, came across an extract from a late eighteenth-century diary about an auction where relics were to be sold which had long been the property of the French Royal Family; also other objects of value. Among these was a reddish-brown garment said to have been brought from the Holy Land to Germany, and from Germany to France. It had been in the possession of a certain French family since 1526, and had always been looked upon as the Coat without Seam. The incursion of this diary extract and the *étude de mœurs* it exhibits is one of the most perfect examples of the largess Baring strews by the way; but the point is that hardly had Christopher finished reading than Sir Joseph entered the library. “I forgot to tell you, Christopher,” he said, “that there are some young folk coming here to-morrow—Stockton’s boy and a friend of his who is in the same regiment called Lawless.”

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In her letters Esther had mentioned that they had seen a good deal of a man called Lawless who had known Christopher at the University and who was great fun . . . etc. Instantly Christopher's heart was flooded by rage, jealousy, and suspicion, for presently the allusions to Lawless ceased. And now once more the sinister augury had happened! And again it was justified, for Lawless fell violently in love with Esther; and thanks to Christopher's incredible behaviour their engagement was broken off, and in the end Lawless married Esther, who gave up her career for ever.

There is no need to follow Christopher through the next stage of his life when he became foreign correspondent to a first-class English journal, except to say that at Constantinople he made friends with a charming Serbian, Madame Turçin, who with a little encouragement would probably have become more than a friend, and who is mentioned here, firstly as possessor of a version of the Holy Coat legend which dated from the time of the fourth Crusade and which she told him should be left to him in her will, secondly, because when Christopher was sent to Rome she gave him a letter of introduction to a very great friend of hers, Madame d'Albert, who lived there.

By this time he had achieved a preponderant position in the world of political journalism, and Italy was destined to be the scene of his final and only genuine love adventure, its object being Antoinette d'Albert—a figure who has some affinity with the beloved "Jenny" of *Comfortless Memory*. In fact, remembering the detective-story kinship between *Overlooked* and *A Triangle*, it seems as if an idea sometimes gets hold of Baring which it takes more than one book to work off.

Yet there is no real likeness between the two women except that both are young unattached widows, both live in Italy, and both have a *clientèle* of people—most of them men—who drop in in the evening and whose attachment is supposed to be strictly platonic. Christopher almost instantly fell desperately in love with Antionette d'Albert, who returned his passion; and

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though her little court annoyed him, he was jealous, he knew not why, of only one among the courtiers, Count Altamura—a good-looking married man who was separated from his wife, and whom many looked upon (wrongly) as Antoinette’s lover. And what contributed to Christopher’s jealousy was the fact that Antoinette was continually begging him not to let anyone divine their liaison—above all not Altamura (who himself was quite unable to conceal the fact that she was his life, his whole existence).

And now, for the third time the Coat without Seam came back definitely into his life. Madame Turçin, who was at Naples for her health, died there, and a week later her husband sent him by hand the book in which was the story. With some trepidation he showed it to Antoinette, and . . . shortly afterwards, when the tide of love seemed likely to sweep away all other considerations, the end came. Altamura’s wife died and he asked Antoinette to marry him. It appeared that during Monsieur d’Albert’s life, Altamura, who adored her, had for a short time been her lover. Her life had been very unhappy in those days, and for her sake he had ruined his own—leaving his wife, who loved him, and in order to be near her throwing a brilliant future overboard. And now she felt that her duty towards him was paramount, and more binding than any written law. She had never even dared to let him know she loved Christopher, and now there was nothing for it but to marry Altamura.

* * * * *

Their final meeting was in London, shortly before the Great War. Antoinette had come over to witness the *début* of a cousin of hers, and in the theatre she caught sight of Christopher and beckoned to him; but Altamura was in the box and there could be no talk of an assignation.

By the purest chance they met next day in St. James’s Park, and Antoinette found time to give him a brief glimpse into her life, from which he gathered that Altamura was desperately jealous; that though (or because) still passionately loved by him, she was a prisoner . . . even now!

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Then they began speaking of the Coat without Seam and she told him that her chief joy was working out in tapestry a certain picture in Madame Turçin's book. He reminded her that she had said one day in Rome that everyone's life is really a Coat without Seam, "only mine," he now added bitterly, "is a patchwork full of holes—seamed and darned, tattered and dirty." And when she said: "Perhaps we only see the wrong side of the needlework," he answered: "Yes, I remember that is what you used to say—but do you still believe it?"

She answered: "I do," and then she told him that in every prayer she ever prayed, his name and no one else's was mentioned, and that she loved him, and would always love him, as on the day when they parted. "I was so afraid," she said, "that I might die without seeing you to tell you this." A clock struck: "I must go; good-bye, Christopher, my dear . . . dear." She pressed his hand and hurried away.

* * * *

When war was declared, Christopher managed to get out with the R.A.M.C. It is with his death—one of the finest things Baring ever wrote, a scene it is not possible to read with a quiet heart—that those who love *The Coat Without Seam* have supreme concern.

On September 1st of the first year of the war, Christopher was at the corner of a road near a wood with his motor ambulance. The German attack had begun, leaves and branches were falling in the wood. Towards one o'clock they saw an officer galloping up the road across which bullets were snapping. He disappeared into the wood. Christopher and Simpson, a trained R.A.M.C. man followed him; they saw him dismount and give his horse to someone and lie down on the ground. Then he beckoned to them; he was wounded and Simpson dressed the wound. The firing was hot and Christopher saw that it was Bruce Lawless. Lawless recognised him. Just behind them a horse was shot, and Lawless said: "You fellows had better go, as you can do me no good and you will only be killed or get taken yourselves."

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They put Lawless on a stretcher and gave him morphia, and at that moment Christopher tripped up over the stump of a tree, and shouted to the others, “All right, go on, I’m coming.”

A moment later he was hit himself and must have lost consciousness for a while. The next thing he remembered was finding himself lying next to Lawless on the ground. . . . They could hear German voices. Lawless said to Christopher:

“I say, I’m for it, and I want to tell you something. I’m sorry about what I did to you—I mean taking Esther from you. They say all’s fair in love and war and I was madly in love with her, but it’s been on my mind all my life that I didn’t quite play the game . . . because I took advantage of your making a fool of yourself just at that moment. I didn’t think you loved her . . . enough. She loved you . . . *then*. Of course it’s been all right in a way and I hope I made her fairly happy. But she gave up her music for me . . . that was all my fault. . . . I don’t believe she would have given it up if she had married you. . . . I wonder if you would mind saying that I can die easy. . . . ?”

Christopher looked at him, and his life-long bitterness surged up in him and his heart hardened like a stone. He said nothing.

“You can’t?” said Lawless. “Very well . . . I suppose I deserve it. I daresay I should do the same. . . .”

Then comes a wonderful passage describing how the Germans swarmed through the wood. Lawless was dead . . . Christopher was taken in an ambulance to a hospital, his wound was dressed, and next morning he was taken to another village. It was stripped bare; the enemy had occupied it and had only just left. There Christopher found Simpson and other R.A.M.C. men, and was taken with other wounded into a beautiful church with stained-glass windows that reminded him of the church at Vernay.

He was half-delirious and had no idea how long he lay in that church. The Curé, an old man, did what he could for them, but there was a terrible shortage of bandages. Christopher thought he was the Bernay Curé and called him by name though he knew it was not really he. Asked if he was a Catholic he shook his head and said, “Autrefois.” Asked if he did not want to make his

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confession he said, "no, no, no," and relapsed into unconsciousness.

The scene that follows is terrible and most beautiful—almost too terrible to be written, perhaps, but for its beauty. I will try to tell in a few words what happened.

Christopher was now lying in a yard, alone but for two Germans who were apparently dying. Again the Curé was there, still asking for bandages; the officer and the doctor left in charge said more had been sent for, but they had not yet come.

Presently shouting was heard, and a crowd of villagers, men, women and children, came into the yard talking and gesticulating headed by a farmer who was dragging a man in rags.

"They caught this man," said the farmer, "red-handed, signalling to the enemy with this." The man was holding a tattered red rag, and the farmer pointed to it. All the people shouted "Spy! Spy!"

The man was wounded and bruised and battered and streaming with blood. His clothes had been torn to shreds.

"It's a lie," he shouted. "I am innocent, I swear it. Save me, Monsieur le Curé. They have half-killed me already—I am dying."

Then the farmer's wife stepped forward. "He lies, Monsieur le Curé," she said. "They caught him in the act and with our Holy Relic, the Holy Coat without Seam that hangs in the church. He stole it, Monsieur le Curé, and used it for signalling from the steeple."

"They lie," groaned the wounded man. . . .

"But the man is bleeding to death," said the Curé.

And so the terrible scene went on. The crowd became violent and said they would not let the man be treated by the doctor. The Curé turned to the doctor: "Leave them to me, Monsieur le Major," he said, "I will deal with them. Please go back to the house, and if you can find some lint send it."

The doctor asked if the Curé thought he could deal with this ugly threatening crowd. "Let me be alone with them, Monsieur le Major," said the Curé, "I know my people."

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The doctor went to the house. The farmer advanced to the Curé and took off his cap: “With all due respect to you, Monsieur le Curé,” he said, “we know that man is a spy, and we will see that justice is done.”

The Curé spoke with authority: “My children,” he said, “you shall leave him to me. He is dying, *c’est mon affaire*.”

The farmer protested again and the crowd snarled. They were like wolves.

“If you take him,” said the Curé, “it will be across my dead body. Now *mes enfants* go home. *All* of you—at once.” There was silence; then they all went away and left the Curé alone with the dying man. “Now, my child,” he said.

“Monsieur le Curé, I am bleeding to death,” gasped the man. “Bind my wounds . . . I never spied, I swear it. They said it because they hate me. . . . I am dying, Monsieur le Curé. . . . I swear this is true. . . . Stop this bleeding. Oh! how I suffer!”

The Curé explained that he had no lint nor a rag of any sort; that the Prussians had taken everything and that he had nothing on him. The wounded man held up the crumbling piece of faded red fabric and said:

“This will do, Monsieur le Curé.” The Curé asked: “Is that the Coat without Seam which belongs to the church?” The man nodded—and through Christopher’s mind flashed pictures connected with that imperishable legend, but as seen in some previous existence.

“How did you find it?” asked the Curé.

“They say I stole it. It is not true. I swear it, Monsieur le Curé.”

“Do not swear. I believe you already. Where did you find it?”

“I found some children playing with it on the road outside the church. I swear . . . quick, quick, Monsieur le Curé, or I shall die.”

The Curé saw it was so. The stream of blood seemed to be beyond control. It was a question of seconds. He made the sign of the Cross and tore the relic into shreds. It was as thin as a cobweb and tore easily. The Curé rolled up a piece of the

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fabric into a pad, stopped the bleeding, and began to bandage him with other shreds. But as soon as the stuff touched the man he cried out: "Stop, Monsieur le Curé."

"What is it, my child?" asked the Curé.

"Stop! I have something to say to you." The Curé told him to wait till he had finished his work . . . there would still be time. "No," said the man . . . "now . . . before . . ." He then confessed that he had lied, that he had stolen the Coat and was indeed a spy; not for money, though they had given him money, but from revenge. . . . "Patience, my child," said the Curé, "till I have bandaged you. Keep still, quite still." And when he had finished he said: "Now I will hear your confession."

The man began to whisper; Christopher felt a sharp twinge of pain and lost consciousness for what seemed an eternity, but in reality it was a short space of time. When he regained consciousness the Curé was bending over him; "And you, mon enfant?" he asked.

"How is he?" asked Christopher.

"He is dead," said the Curé.

"I am dying, too," said Christopher, "and I want you to hear my confession."

The Curé heard his confession, and when it was over Christopher said to him:

"I found the Coat without Seam after all, Monsieur le Curé. The real one you told me about at Vernay when you gave me the *mirliton*. But I needn't have searched *because it was there all the time*. It was my life that was a Coat without Seam. But I tore it into shreds and now you have mended it. There is no seam in it now."

"Oui, oui, mon enfant," said the Curé, thinking that Christopher was delirious.

Later, when the ambulance came back and the doctor and the orderly came to look after Christopher, they saw it was not necessary to send him to the base for he was dead. But they took back the two Germans.

XXX

'ROBERT PECKHAM'—"IN MY END IS MY BEGINNING"

ROBERT PECKHAM (1930)

IN the cloister of the Church of San Gregorio at Rome is a tablet bearing an epitaph, the pith of which, translated, is: "Here lies Robert Peckham, Englishman and Catholic, who after England's break with the Church, left England because he could not live in his country without the Faith, and having come to Rome, died there because he could not live apart from his country."

This tablet was put up at Peckham's desire by his friend Monsignor Claud Mangot who is supposed to be the author of this "sad history," as he calls it, on a sort of prefatory fly-leaf.

Anxious to glean all that was possible regarding the incidents on which this story reposes, one is able to state that the main ones are facts, not fictions; also that, as we are told in the book, the epitaph on the tablet is a good deal longer than what is given here. It appears that the author searched for it in vain for twenty years, his informant, Mr. Reggie Balfour, a convert, having told him it was in the Lateran.

Denham Place, where the Peckhams lived, was rebuilt in the reign of William and Mary, and is occupied at present (1937) by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Robert Peckham's heart was buried in Denham Church, where there is a long epitaph in English, and where Baring had seen other Denham tombs. It is also an historical fact that, as happens in the story, Henry Peckham, Robert's younger brother, was beheaded in the Tower.

Probably it adds nothing to the artistic worth of a book, but

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it immensely increases its human interest to know that this curious story is, in a certain sense, a slice of biography carved out of English history. It is like Baring's celebrated "pedigree reserve" to have hushed this up, or at least left his readers free to take it all for pure fiction, if they chose; but it gives the writer malicious pleasure to tell the truth here!

Throughout this book you have the feeling that the conditions at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries are faithfully rendered; it is a picture based on serious study, imagination, and freedom from bias.

The figures concerned are Peckham's father, Sir Edmund, whom Henry VIII accounted one of his most faithful servants, his weak-kneed eldest son, Robert, another son, Henry, the villain of the piece, and their women-kind—all admirably chosen to stand out well against the background of their epoch. Sir Edmund, who is in the Treasury and a Privy Councillor, is a perfectly honest, wholly uncynical forerunner of the Vicar of Bray. Having taken a solemn oath to Henry VIII to be a faithful servant of his heirs, he stood in turn unwaveringly by Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth, countenancing in due rotation reform and Catholic policy, and helping to do away first with Lady Jane Grey and then with Mary Queen of Scots.

After his death Robert succeeded to the title and estates bestowed on his father as reward for his flexibility; but as the years passed, finding it was now impossible to hear Mass outside London, he left England for ever, and, as we see from the tablet, died of homesickness at Rome. Being, "not to put too fine a point upon it," a man of feeble character, incapable of saying either yea or nay, and whose domestic and extra-domestic amorous experiences were on a par with those of most of Baring's male characters, one starts with a sort of limping respect for him which gradually turns into contempt; wherein I fancy we disappoint the author, who seems to have sketched him with an idea of waking our sympathy.

Notwithstanding this perhaps unsuccessful shot on the part of the author-sportsman, the book holds one from cover to

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cover; which, as Arnold Bennett remarked, is what chiefly matters. There is an admirable scene between Sir Edmund, Robert, and “a mountain of flesh, propped up against cushions, dressed in a night-gown of russet velvet furred with sable, with a yellow face, flabby and seamed, out of which grey eyes shot sharp darts of light.” One cannot help thinking with longing of an earlier pleasanter Baring-peep of Henry VIII quarrelling with Catherine Parr for not being able to boil an egg properly, and cancelling his order to have her beheaded instantly because he has just composed a galliard which none but she could accompany to his satisfaction. It was on the occasion of that last interview with the dying monarch that the oath was taken which eventually drove Robert out of the country.

A remarkable side-issue in this book is Robert’s connection with his old College friend Hynd, who gradually slid away from his faith as Catholic, went over to the reformers and eventually became an emissary between Mary Stuart and the poet Ronsard who adored her, and who then lived in the Vendôme. The description of that quest on which Hynd lost his life, and Robert’s visit to Ronsard, are amazingly vital; so are Robert’s letters from Rome to the only woman he ever loved, Mistress Anthony Restwold, who had gradually come to sympathise with the reformers. Her husband had died and Robert, who, from a mistaken sense of honour, had married a woman he did not love, was now a widower; but she would not marry him, feeling there could be no happy union between her, to whom religion meant but little, and one to whom it was the chief thing in life, although under the stress of such passion as he could achieve he offered to un-Romanise himself!

Taken all in all one cannot believe that Robert’s religious convictions amounted to much more than a habit of mind, though here and there one hits on a phrase less suggestive of the smouldering of damp straw than most of the motions of his spirit.

The drawing of all the characters—and as usual plenty of them tread the stage—is strong and various, and the whole book has a

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fascination it is difficult to locate but which accounts for Baring's admirers putting in the front rank among his works. That extraordinarily moving inscription that hangs so lonely in an Italian cloister is exactly what an imagination like Baring's responds to, and he has managed to pass on the thrill in spite of the constitutional dankness of Robert. That he "perceived" Robert just like that and not as a more alluring hero is a genuine Baring touch—and how some of us delight in those uncompromising "*quand même*" Baring touches!

Another merit of the book is that it mirrors quite ordinary unheroic people under the horror of these cruelly perplexing times. Here the flaming glory of the martyr is toned down to the rushlight of relatively stagnant souls who die inch by inch without glamour. This is the level on which the majority of us work out the problem of existence, and one is grateful to the author for bringing all his usual qualities—style, picturesqueness, scholarship and limpid sincerity, though in this case the instruments are slightly muted—to bear on the flotsam and jetsam of that terrific storm called the Reformation.

"IN MY END IS MY BEGINNING" (1931)

It is a valuable quality in an author when, as Vernon Lee once said in high praise of an admired contemporary, "You can never tell what she will be up to next." Opening the above massive volume and realising that, except for a *Coda* of thirty pages, it consists of one particular section of Mary Stuart's sad life as recounted in turn by each of the Queen's four Maries, well might one echo that remark, and murmur: "What next?" For this seemed an original but distinctly hazardous undertaking.

Of course, people in close attendance upon Royalty are obliged by the nature of their office to conform to a given pattern—a necessity apt to result in impaired moral eyesight and somewhat doctored views of Life and Being. One imagines therefore that Court life must be inimical to originality, and that literary genius would improbably blossom in carefully horticultured Palace

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Gardens. Nor was confidence in Baring's inflexible regard for truth a matter for unmixed rejoicing, for it seemed unlikely that in the interests of diversity, he would turn one of the mild Maries of this Court of Beauty into a sharp-tongued potential Sarah Duchess of Marlborough. For all of which reasons one opened the book with trepidation.

It must be honestly stated that the present writer has never perused the book from cover to cover. On reading it for the first time, as soon as the end of the third contribution, that of Mary Livingstone, had been reached, the next eighty pages containing Mary Seton's narrative were skipped in order to plunge into the final report, attributed to Jane Kennedy, one of the two serving women eventually permitted by Sir Amyas Paulet and “the two Earls” (Kent and Shrewsbury) to attend their mistress on the scaffold.

A few years later the book was once more tackled by the present writer—this time on a system which, if persisted in, might have ended in a more sympathetic appreciation. Going carefully some way through all four versions, references were listed and paged; and now and again one came on a very pointful item, such as: “All the Maries insist on the Queen's innocence in the matter of Darnley's murder, except Mary Fleming, who evidently believed she was privy to it.” But few of the entries were as pregnant as this, and one seemed to be constantly registering data like: “All four agree it was a rainy night”; or “Mary Beton and Mary Seton are the only two who mention the walking stick”; or “Three of them say it was rough on the Firth, but Mary Livingstone speaks of a fine crossing. Perhaps she was a good sailor.”

In fact, the sport soon became wearisome, and remembering Montaigne's system when baffled by an obscure passage of making two “charges” at it and then giving it up, the *listing-cum-reference* plan was soon abandoned. And if to this day Mary Seton's narrative has not been read, probably it strongly resembles the other three.

But one point must not be forgotten. From his youth upwards this author has been in love with Mary Stuart, and to the eye of

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love there may be vast differences between these four contributions to the history of their beloved Mistress, compiled by four Court ladies encased in four strait-waistcoats. And he who has evolved them out of his inner consciousness should surely know best? for creators, like mothers, perceive points about their offspring which escape an outsider. I daresay Mrs. Tweedle maintained that only a fool could mistake Tweedle-dum for Tweedle-dee. And should she later on have presented Mr. Tweedle with another brace of twins (Tweedle-lum and Tweedle-lee), very likely she will have said, given feminine contempt for logic, that now there could be no further excuse for confusing one child with another.

I imagine this book will have had a resounding success among professors, record compilers, dictionary architects, and members of boards whose duty it is to guard the entrance of Scotch Universities. It might also be invaluable reading for persons marooned on desert islands. But for ordinary mortals it is a stiff proposition till you come to the indescribably harrowing thirty pages ascribed to Jane Kennedy, who is supposed to have forwarded them to Mary Seton. This report describes the last weeks of Mary Stuart's sojourn in this world, and in its restraint and piercing simplicity is the sort of thing no one but Baring could have written.

In any case, though he once described this book as *histoire romanesque*, it is a valuable contribution to Mary Stuart literature, for in the Preface we are told that every speech put into the mouth of the Queen has some foundation in contemporary documents. The whole of that Preface is characteristic and extremely interesting, and I have it direct from the author that not a single detail in Jane Kennedy's record is invented, and that most of the other details scattered about the book are taken from Campden's *History of Queen Elizabeth*, which was published in 1625, two years after Campden's death.

There is one point on which one cannot help regretting that no light is thrown, not even in the Preface. Every schoolgirl

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has burned with passion for this Queen; and it was a disappointment to find nothing in the book about the Mary, who, in a Scotch Ballad we all knew by heart in our youth, says:

“Last night the Queen had four Maries—
To-night she will have but three . . .
There was Mary Beton and Mary Seton
And Mary Carmichael and me.”

One was gingerly given to understand that this Mary was beheaded for a crime that is not dwelt upon in Schools for Young Ladies, and it would have been nice to have the whole story from Baring. But perhaps poor “me” was a fiction—a sort of poetical Mrs. Harris. Anyhow, the Ballad proves that more than one noble Scotch family claimed the honour of connection with that glowing heart of grim Scotch history, Mary Stuart, for in Baring’s account—and one knows his conscientiousness—there is no mention of a Mary Carmichael.*

To sum up with the humility which becomes anyone who deals with the work of a great artist—and in the present case this humility is sincere as well as seemly—*In my End is my Beginning* does not quite give satisfaction, partly because it fails to kindle a glow. Maybe it was not intended to, but one could not help expecting it. In any case, should the book spend much of its life on a shelf, one likes to think it is there, and renders up thanks for the underground passion to which it owes its existence.

Postscript.

[Re-reading what has been said here, it is amusing and exhilarating to find that, notwithstanding the above paragraph, something rather like half a brick made of felt has been hurled at the head of this author instead of the usual bouquet. Most people like a change, and readers, if any, may possibly note this one with a certain sense of relief.]

* I have just heard that “me” was a maid, Mary Hamilton.—E. S.

XXXI

"FRIDAY'S BUSINESS" (1933)

THIS book, which is the combined outcome of experiences at school and in the Near East, is practically founded on the author's power of casting a long line over the far-away past, hooking a bit of vivid life, and bringing it into effortless connection with whatever subject is in his mind when writing a book; which is another way of putting the point I so often dwell on.

His first cast is over his beloved Eton, where—so it appears—there are mysterious occasions on which, unlike what happens in *Alice in Wonderland*, to-morrow becomes to-day. Tasks which, properly speaking, belong to Friday morning are worked off on Thursday, whereby Thursday, usually a half holiday, is turned into a whole school day. Among the boys this proceeding is called "*Friday's business*," and is celebrated by a chant of singular flatness, the words of which run:

"Why not to-morrow? Why not to-morrow?"

"Why, because to-morrow is to-day . . . ay" (*his*).

Only this much for the moment. But we shall see presently the connection between that schoolboy memory and what turned out to be the last scene in the life of Patrick Croome, Irishman, gentleman and journalist, d.s.p. aged twenty-nine.

A curious, but, since the war not unfamiliar happening runs through the book. Patrick, whom we have already met heading a minor scene of rebellion at Eton, and who now was feeling his leisurely way *via* political journalism or anything that might turn up to the House of Commons, had drifted to Novograd, capital of Kossovia—a near Eastern principality which had been rounded off and stabilised after the Great War, and which just now, for political reasons, was much in the news, as we put it to-day. There

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he found not only two old schoolfellows, one a journalist, the other in business, but a certain Mr. Ducros—an Englishman in spite of his name—whom he had known as a not very successful Eton master, but who now was the most trusted adviser of the King and a name to conjure with throughout the country. It was no secret that if Kossovia had preserved her independence during the post-war European scrambling and re-shuffling, it was thanks to Ducros’s wise counsels; and what with an Olympian position in the upper ether of the London Press, and his reputed descent from a mighty Magyar family, he practically directed the foreign policy of the country.

There is no doubt whence came the idea of this book when we remember the celebrated J. D. Bouchier, another Englishman with a foreign name, who began life as an Eton master; gave up schoolmastering because he was incapable of keeping the demons in the fourth form in order; subsequently blossomed into a brilliant journalist; got on to the foreign staff of *The Times*, and became the power next the throne in the days of Ferdinand King of Bulgaria.

To go back to Patrick; before starting for the Near East he had fallen in love with Marie von Ahlen who, with her American mother, had been romantically stranded by a bicycle break-down at the Irish home of Patrick’s altogether delightful father, Sir Roland Croome. Marie’s father, Count von Ahlen, whom Sir Roland had known in his diplomatic days, was now Danish Minister at Novograd—a fact which no doubt gave body to what had up to now been a vague intention of Patrick’s to make Novograd a jumping-off place for further Near Eastern adventure. There was no money on either side, and violent opposition from Marie’s parents was a certainty. So the young people thought it best to keep their engagement secret till they should meet at Novograd and discuss the next step.

Arrived at Novograd, after a fortnight’s stay at the English Legation, Patrick established himself in lodgings. Unfortunately a day or two before the von Ahlens were expected, the aeroplane in which friends were giving Patrick a joy-ride crashed. No one

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was hurt except Patrick, who lay for a few days unconscious, and discovered, when he came to himself, that a large slice of his previous life had become a blank. He had lost all recollection of the von Ahlens, or even of their having stayed with his father; and when allowed to see people again he had to convey the fact to them as best he could.

Now it had been obvious since a week or so before the accident that Patrick was becoming enamoured of a fascinating and remarkable young widow, Eurydice Pakst—half-Greek, half-Kossovian; consequently his friend the Minister and the two old Etonians, without knowing anything about the Marie entanglement, rather wondered if this loss of memory were not an Irish tarra-diddle adopted for reasons it was not difficult to guess. But Marie herself at once saw that Patrick's account of himself was genuine, and silently accepted the fact that her short love story was over. And of course she instantly perceived that he was now in love with Eurydice Pakst.

For a former opponent of Woman Suffrage Baring has made a sympathetic and convincing portrait of Eurydice—a woman consumed by two passions, science à la Madame Curie, and love for her country, which, at the present juncture, involved constant immersion in politics, science for the time being taking second place. It is not necessary to describe, even if one quite grasped their nature, the three factions that were storming round and round in the Kossovian teacup, but one can roughly call them Effete Liberals, Communists, and a so-called National Party, the "Fackelists," whose policy seems to have resembled that of a western faction better known to us, whose name likewise begins with an "F"!

In this last faction Eurydice was a moving spirit, but the one thing she drew the line at was a foreign leader however beloved of the people (which Ducros undoubtedly was). This remarkable woman was reputed to have gone through Love and passed out the other side, but she was not above using time-honoured feminine methods of enticing men of the opposition into her camp—among them the young and radiantly handsome Colonel

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Wittingratz, idol of the army, and Vilenko, leader of the reds—both men to be reckoned with and both madly in love with her. The result of this fact on the political situation and on Patrick’s peace of mind can not only be imagined, but is admirably described.

The fisherman’s second cast concerns Vernon Lee’s beautiful play *Ariadne in Mantua*, which was mounted that summer at Novograd by the very go-ahead “Unprejudiced Theatre,” and the plot of which is as follows.

Ferdinand Duke of Mantua had long been a captive among the infidels, and when he eventually escaped and returned to Mantua he was found to be suffering from overwhelming melancholy and almost complete loss of memory. He was eventually cured by the music of a wonderfully gifted Moorish youth called Diego, under whose cunning disguise he failed to recognise Magdalen, a courtesan he had loved to frenzy when a prisoner, by whom he had been equally beloved, and who, at sacrifice of herself, had effected his escape.

The cure being successfully accomplished, the Duke’s engagement to his royal cousin Princess Hippolyta was announced, and as part of the wedding festivities a masque called “Ariadne” was given on an island in the lake. In the last scene of Vernon’s play, Ariadne, who, we remember, was forsaken at Naxos, is supposed to drown herself; but Diego, who all unrecognised was playing the part, had taken measures to make of semblance a reality. And when her lifeless form is drawn from the water and laid upon the grass, the horror-stricken Court cries: “It is Diego”; but bending over her the Duke whispers softly “Magdalen”; whereupon the curtain falls.

Readers of Vernon’s play—and at the single ignoble performance given in London it was the same thing—have always held different opinions as to whether the Duke’s failure to recognise Magdalen was *bona-fide*, or, since he could not marry her, a convenient fiction. The same question was discussed at Novograd, Eurydice being among those who maintained that of course he had recognised her, but concealed the fact to simplify

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the situation. Asked by Eurydice for his opinion, Patrick replied that he agreed with her, and even believed that in feigning not to recognise Magdalen, the Duke wished her to understand, once for all, that everything was over. Marie could not help noticing that this verdict of Patrick's rather pleased Eurydice, but she herself stoutly maintained that the Duke had really taken Diego for what he professed to be—a marvellously gifted singing boy—till the shock of tragedy unsealed his eyes.

Of course, the case of the Duke's lapse of memory and that of Patrick are not on all fours, but by now readers will have grasped why Vernon's play figures in this book, and guess how exquisitely it has been worked in.

Meanwhile the genuineness of Patrick's brain failure is shortly put beyond question. One day, when he is standing idly outside the Danish Legation, a street row on a small scale breaks out, and Patrick is stunned by a blow on the head with a stick intended for one of the sentries. When he recovered consciousness and saw Marie bending over the bed on which they had laid him, suddenly the mists rolled away. . . . The magic days in Ireland came back in a flood; he took her in his arms and all would have ended happily but for the tragic consequences of what was probably the only rather mean action Patrick had ever committed. Which brings us to the second instance of Baring's allusive, gulf-spanning methods. This time it is a breeze from far-away schoolboy days that blows across the stage, incidentally explaining why the book has so strange a title.

During the time of Patrick's now evaporated infatuation for Eurydice, without having any fixed convictions on the subject of Kossovian politics, he had been drawn some little way down that road. One day, when he was sitting with her in a cabaret, soldiers passed in the street singing their new revolutionary song, the refrain of which was:

"Why *wait* for our freedom? Why wait till *to-morrow*?
There'll now be no to-morrow,
For to-morrow is to-day!"

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“Friday’s business!” said Patrick to himself smiling, and back into his mind rushed a scene in a class-room at Eton, when he and two boon companions had decided to “rag” Ducros, whereby a riot was started. Books were flung about, a white mouse was chivied from desk to desk, in short pandemonium reigned, while Ducros, intimidated and helpless, vainly tried to restore order. Then Patrick, backed by a chorus, began shouting the *Friday’s Business* chant, when suddenly the door was flung open and the Head appeared—speechless—terrible! . . . You could have heard a pin drop, and at the end of the term the luckless Ducros left Eton for good.

“If you really want to get rid of Ducros,” said Patrick suddenly to Eurydice, “I can tell you how to do it, but I won’t unless you swear that, once the deed is done, you will reward me with your love.” She promised, and he told her about that class-room riot; how Ducros was one of those people who are equal to any situation when invested with *official* authority, but crumple up if jeered at and defied, having no *personal* authority. And if the Kossovians were to find out that their strong man cannot face an angry crowd, his prestige would vanish like smoke. “Summon a meeting,” urged Patrick, “organise catcalls and orange-peel, and that will be the end of Ducros.”

A few days later both Eurydice and Wittingratz were shot dead in the foyer of the Theatre by Vilenko, who turned down the gas and made good his escape. But probably Eurydice would have passed on Patrick’s valuable hint to her party; so, hearing that they had called a meeting, and remembering with remorse his betrayal of Ducros’s weakness, Patrick begged his two friends to join him and act as bodyguard to Ducros, who, it was announced, was to make a speech. When the time came, Ducros graciously beckoned them up to seats on the platform and the proceedings opened in a friendly and peaceful key. But the anti-Ducros party had organised things thoroughly and the meeting grew stormier and stormier. Presently a half-drunk

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man, flourishing a pistol, advanced towards the platform and took aim at Ducros. Horrified, the Englishmen closed round him, but it was too late; Patrick was shot through the heart, and at the third shot Ducros fell dead.

Totally different to anything else of his I know, *Friday's Business* seems to me one of the most delightful books Baring or anyone else has written.

XXXII

"THE LONELY LADY OF DULWICH"—"DARBY AND JOAN"

"THE LONELY LADY OF DULWICH" (1934)

THERE are now only two more novels of Baring's to discuss, and the penultimate one, which bears the lovely title of *The Lonely Lady of Dulwich*, is so short and so absorbing, that one is tempted to follow the example of one of his foreign reviewers who merely says: "This, one of Baring's masterpieces, is too short to analyse," and goes on to something else. As for its shortness, the refrain of a song with which Reynaldo Hahn used to intoxicate us thirty years ago: "Dieu la fait petite pour la faire gentille," runs through one's head, while an insistent question pushes to the front: is it vulgarity to tax a work of art by its bulk, as if it were a mountain, or a pugilist, or a parcel from the grocer; or is it merely a natural, convenient and justifiable scale of measurement?

Leaving this thorny question unsolved, one would like to put another which very definitely concerns *The Lonely Lady*. Supposing you are an authority—say, a highly-paid reviewer who constantly exalts to heaven very poor books; or a picture-dealer who is for ever being taken in by fakes; or a horse-dealer who often sells for £1,000 an animal that the purchaser is glad to get rid of a year later for a thousand shillings—or even pence. What does this imply?

I ask because that sort of thing happens all the time to Zita Harmer, the heroine of this book; a woman of great beauty and charm whose response to every riddle life propounds is wildly wrong.

For instance: of a very worldly pleasure-loving sister, whose rich scamp of a husband to whom she was much attached ran away from her leaving her destitute, Zita remarked, that this was

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a blessing in disguise, for her sister had always despised wealth and loathed society. Of her own husband, a *gourmet* of genius, she said: "O, Robert likes anything; he doesn't know what he is eating!" Of the Lawlesses—he, a charmer for whom, nevertheless, only one woman in the world existed; she, one of those women who are jealous even when they have ceased to love, who, as Baring puts it, go on having tooth-ache long after all their teeth are gone—of this couple Zita remarked: "Lady Lawless is so sensible, never jealous. I suppose she thinks there is safety in numbers." Of the poet, Jean de Bosis—a man obviously predestined to illustrate in his own life what "*une grande passion*" stands for—whose passion for herself nearly killed him and quite killed his talent, she said he was evidently a domestic character; one cut out for bucolic pleasures and who would never love anyone as much as he loved his mother.

So it was with most of the judgments formed by this lady; and well might her husband's cousin Amelia say to herself: "Zita isn't stupid, but she has no more perception than a rhinoceros; which is curious, seeing what a sensitive creature she is in some ways." Finally, as worst of all her bad guesses, not only does Zita fall head-over-ears in love with Walter Price—a good-looking bounder of a journalist—but in order to provide him with a "scoop" such as will make his fortune with his American Editor, she faces in the name of Love the moral equivalent of the ordeal gone through by Lady Godiva. Madly believing that admiration of her courage, combined with gratitude for her sacrifice of her delicacy, will galvanise Walter's reverential friendship into love—not knowing, of course, that for two years he had been engaged to a girl as common as himself—everything is thrown to the winds; consideration for a kindly husband, respect for the passion of a dead man, her own self-respect . . . everything; and so poor Zita passes naked through the columns of the American Press to her doom. Robert, as she foresaw he would, draws up a dead of separation, and Zita turns into the Lonely Lady of Dulwich.

‘‘THE LONELY LADY OF DULWICH’’

It is a sad, an almost unbearably tragic story; and but for certain suggestive cases one recalls, it would seem almost incredible. King Arthur and King Mark have inevitably come down to us as bores, and one of them was elderly; yet both were gentlemen, using the word as applicable to the fine-fibred of any class; nor can one imagine either Guinevere or Isolde falling in love with a cad. Possibly Paris may have had leanings that way (though if we think so, it is perhaps Baring’s fault for making one of the family remark in *Unreliable History* that “Helen always *did* like impossible men”). But anyhow, Paris had two points in his favour, he was a shepherd, and he was beautiful; whereas Walter Price, professional ferreter-out, for purposes of vulgar “copy,” of the private secrets of celebrities—whether living or dead—was not only apprentice to a trade that no one with very delicate feelings would adopt, but seemed cut out by Nature for the job. And one asks oneself whether, because he was passably good-looking, one can forgive Zita her infatuation?

Yes! one can, thanks to Baring’s limitless sympathy with human nature, and the boldness of his imagination and methods as novelist. He takes a figure like Zita, and by his art compels us to see her through his eyes. And what we see is a child in a fairy story being lured by a wicked fairy into the ogre’s den. Baring never makes things easy for his readers, he forces them to face facts that lie outside current morality and that some of us rather shy away from; such as that people whose faults and weaknesses are glaringly obvious, often lend more grace, more warmth, more effulgence, in a word more beauty to the earthly scene than many whose moral inventory—so we should have thought—would make a better show at the Great Auction.

Re-reading this book under the impression of Baring’s whole novelistic output, taken item by item, one is struck with the strides he has made in the technique of character-drawing. As regards his *style*, he seems to have emerged in print with the limpid simplicity, the infallible choice of the right word that many authors aim at all their lives and never acquire. But the

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power to draw, in relatively few words and mainly by implication, an apparently simple but in reality extremely *unusual* character like Robert Harmer, Baring has won by terrific self-mastery and experience. In his youth he could not have done it.

And as with Robert, so it is with the other characters in this story. Most of them are hardly elaborated at all, but are made to tell in three strokes. A reviewer could—and perhaps should—extend himself on this theme, but the pre-occupation with Zita overrides everything else.

It is interesting and to the point to ask oneself how Baring has contrived to invest her with so much charm. I do not know, but could, I think, if space allowed, draw attention to an explanatory point here and there. A dozen delicate touches contribute to it, even the description made after her death of her final anchorage at Dulwich. It was a quite ordinary little suburban cottage; nothing in it gave the slightest indication of anything individual or personal; in the bedroom a cheap crucifix, a large coloured lithograph of the Holy Family, and so on. It was evident that when she took the place she had changed nothing in the decoration, introduced no furniture of her own. But it was smothered in roses, and in the unpretentious little garden there was something rare and intensely individual, for gardening had been the Lonely Lady's sole passion. One can imagine another less lonely lady, trained to the careful selection of cushions that will go with the curtains, and rugs that will go with both—a lady accustomed to wander about furniture emporiums and see to everything herself (with or without some artistically "real person" to lend a hand), one can imagine such a one saying: "Why, the woman evidently had no taste!" And if she noticed the garden at all, which is not probable, she would probably add: "But she seems to have had a rather clever job-gardener." (Baring likes laying these traps for the unwary.)

The last page of the book contains three entries from a note-book found in one of those dreadful "desks" on which, in the middle of the nineteenth century, girls were supposed to write—if they could. These entries—the only ones in the note-book—

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are so poignant in their simplicity—give such a picture of a heart that in truth was empty save for one disastrous passion—a heart pierced once for all by a dagger, yet not pierced into painlessness—these entries, I say, are so haunting and so inevitably the only possible last word of this perfect story, that even if no other novel had come out of Baring’s brain, *The Lonely Lady of Dulwich* would justify the almost unanimous appraisal of his French reviewers—that Baring is one of the finest novelists England has ever produced.

“DARBY AND JOAN” (1935)

Economy and distinction are perennial hall-marks of this author’s style; but in this novel, the last he has written so far, certain elements seem to have been cast overboard that make the charm of most of the other novels; notably of *The Lonely Lady*, written only during the previous year.

If *Darby and Joan* were a vintage, the comment of some connoisseurs would be: “Yes, I like my wine dry, but about this sample there is rather too little flavour of the grape.” So austere is the manner in which the story is told, that at first reading it seems more like a synopsis than a completed recital—more like a scaffolding than a house you can live in.

The consciousness that man is the sport of destiny and the slave of emotion underlies all Baring’s work, but in this case it is conveyed by a series of rather bald statements of facts; as one who should describe a yachting tour round the Mediterranean merely naming the ports of call, without a word about what you saw or about your travelling companions. It is not a short story; but though “Jenny” (*Comfortless Memory*), “Antoinette” (*The Coat Without Seam*), “Mrs. Housman” (*Passing By*), and even *The Lonely Lady* are not elaborate studies, we have clear ideas as to their personalities, whereas of Joan it seems almost impossible to form a precise, or at least an adequate notion.

Towards the end of the book there is a passage about her that sheds light, where you are told that English people liked but did

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not understand her; then, remembering that her mother had been an Italian, they were apt to say: "That accounts for it!" The author tells us that by "it" was probably meant "a profound fundamental indifference to the doings and opinions of other people; a reserved manner, mixed with moments and outbursts of frankness and directness of speech to which they were not used and which the English ladies excused as being 'so Italian.'"

It appears that the midshipmen at Malta thought her "great fun"—a very good mark indeed for Joan. But we find her saying to herself, in "why not?" vein, that she had already been two people in her life, and now, during the latter half of her married life with her second husband, Robert Keith, she's a third person. That's all! But these chameleon changes are rather baffling and confuse the picture; also they are not very attractive, and I fancy we are meant to be in love with Joan.

The book starts with a letter that a hall-porter failed to deliver, and proceeds from one misunderstanding to another. Marriages are contracted owing to wrong impressions scattered about by Chance in malignant or ironical mood, and acted on haphazard; in fact, the story is exactly like a description of a very unsatisfactory day's hunting; scent bad, the hounds not up to much; foxes continually being changed, and the kill, though staving off the shame of a blank day, not exciting.

On the other hand, the account of Joan's marriage to Lord Glencairn is arresting from start to finish and extraordinarily moving, partly perhaps because it is irradiated by Glencairn's passion for the actress Anais Dorzan. Baring excels in re-creating for us the magic of great acting, and here is part of his description of Dorzan's art:

"She had a strange voice, a little nasal, with a tang in it. At first you were not sure whether it was pleasing, and then you were caught by its delicate half-tones, and after a time it was irresistible, ravishing, sheer magic. There was nothing she could not express from the ringing laugh of a tomboy to the wild cry of despair of a hunted animal; and then in her soft passages there was a thrill in her voice, something bitter-sweet and infinitely sad

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that melted the heart and gave you cold shivers; like a violin played by a great artist, or the flute of a faun, or the Pipes of Pan. . . . Musset's 'Camille,' in that delicate poem of a play, was the part in which her art seemed most consummate. She made the passion—the suppressed passion, the stifled pride—ring so true. She expressed in it all the thwarted and baffled desire of all unhappy lovers; quietly, simply and rapidly.”

If, as I said, the whole episode connected with Joan's first marriage is marvellously conceived and handled, it is partly because of the leaven of Dorzan.

Puzzled by something that, on the whole, the present writer finds unsatisfying in this book, one remembers that in a prefatory note we are told that the story—a very, very complicated one—is true, and that it happened between the years 1546 and 1629—dates transposed by Baring into 1855 and 1930. This perhaps accounts for a touch of uncertainty in the presentment, as of a sixteenth-century garment cut about and made up to look like the latest creation of a present-day dressmaker. None the less, the book is very interesting, and in it are exquisite touches, like a phrase which completes the description of a sunset. “There was a glory as of silent music in the air.” Also shrewd remarks, such as that when a jealous woman unjustly accuses her lover of being under the charm of another woman, she sometimes puts the idea into his head; “sows the seed,” and presently may find it has grown into a plant!

Again, respecting Joan's second husband, Robert, there are revealing hints, such as that he collected ivories and for years and years had been translating *Don Quixote*. “He called this *his work*, and had now reached the third chapter.” He also was the respectful (and possibly amorous) prey of Beryl Childs, a pretty woman built of bricks made of various kinds of sham. But many of Baring's husbands betray this weakness, Guido Roccapalumba, and Robert Harmer, for instance.

As landscape painter, few writers, I think, come anywhere near Baring; and to all who know Malta (including many a

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secret poet hidden in the Royal Navy, disguised as midshipman or Lieutenant-Commander), one would venture to point out a certain picture on page 198.

A little farther on is a still more memorable passage. Robert was obliged to pass the winter in Malta, and one summer, while they were in England, Joan's only real friend in the island, old Doctor Valea, died suddenly. And now they were on their way back there, and her boys being at school in England she says to herself: "I am alone in the world, and shall remain alone till I die." As the steamer neared the island, buildings, sky, and sea shone in a rosy and golden haze—a glory of hope and triumph. Whatever was to happen to Joan and her life, something had begun again on that October morning; and it was manifest that nature had no intention of retiring from business or shutting up the shutters of the many-coloured world."

Strange to relate—strange, I mean, given Baring's proclivities—this beautiful passage is in a sense prophetic. Joan and the man she had always loved, Alexander Lutrell, both now in early middle age, come together at last, and walk through the remainder of their lives hand-in-hand as Darby and Joan.

On the last half-page is a delectable little bit of irony. Looking at Walter Bell's fine portrait of Joan, painted soon after her marriage with Alexander, her grandchild Susan remarks: "How calm you look, Granny! The Victorians always look calm. I suppose it's because nothing ever happened to you?"

"Nothing," said Joan.

And that is the last word of the book.

XXXIII

"HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO DECLARE?" (1936)

It is nothing short of what used to be called in certain nineteenth-century religious circles a "Dispensation," that hardly was this study begun than a new book of Baring's called *Have you Anything to Declare?* appeared—a book which after a fashion sets the seal on all that has been trying to express itself in these pages.

What distinguishes Baring's Anthology, for such it is, from other works of the kind is, that it is furnished with commentaries by the author; and as you turn the pages, remembering that someone has said: "Show me a man's friends and I'll tell you what he is," you ask yourself if a finer and more comprehensive group of intimates can be imagined than come together in this book, collected, so Baring tells us, more or less at random; by which he means that the list is not exhaustive.

If you lay it down, and take a sort of mental aeroplane flight back through the thirty or forty works it has been the task and delight of many months to examine, a twofold meditation ensues.

Firstly one recalls a remark of Renan's already quoted, but which I now go so far as to say should be engraved on little brass plates and nailed on to the doors of members of all *nil admirari* brigades and Debunking Brotherhoods throughout the world: "La valeur morale de l'homme est en proportion de sa faculté d'admirer." And the second meditation can be summed up in the words "Of course!"—meaning that only one on whom nature has bestowed a certain bulk and quality of heart and brain, and who has fed on every kind of beauty since he was a boy, could have written those books.

As I think his letters indicate, apart from literary qualifications,

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all his work is built on solid piles, one of them being an easy, staggeringly sympathetic and unpretentious type of culture. In all literature I do not think there can be anything like this last Book of Revelations; and what gives intensity to each example of beauty is the certainty that a few pages farther on you will find an equally rare one in another language.

As regards the specimens he himself has translated, the flexibility of mind and delicacy of ear that rendered the mastery of foreign languages almost effortless to him, must inevitably help a translator to feel the exact texture of what he is translating, and give us the equivalent in English with the maximum of directness and simplicity. We who are not classical scholars might turn dumb with diffidence when renderings of the classics are under consideration, were it not that Baring defines a good translation of a poem as one which impresses a reader with its beauty, *whether he knows the original or not*, and at the same time satisfies *one who does know it*. Apart from this dictum I think that a non-classical scholar has sometimes a certain *flair* as to the extent an original has been tampered with. For instance, reading Willamowitz-Möller's translations of Euripides (which are most beautiful as to language) even a non-scholar can guess that they are more Greek, more simple, more austere, closer in every way to the original, than anything that has been done in this line in English, from Shelley downwards. And as regards single poems, if so disposed you can judge Baring's fidelity to his classical models by seeing how he has handled such as are written in languages you know.

Meanwhile, accepting his dictum as to the test of a good translation, one makes bold to ask whether anything can be more soul-satisfying than his versions of the two Odes of Horace, *To the Fountain of Bandusia* and *To Pyrrha*; also of the famous Ode that begins "Eheu fugaces," which he wrestled with while waiting for his General in some village in the North of France during the war. As for his handling of what must be the most heart-rending poem Catullus has written, beginning "Siqua recordanti benefacta priora voluptas" (in the index Baring calls it "the poet's farewell

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to love”), I am acquainted with three translations, one of them German; and none approach Baring’s in beauty. Somewhere he remarks that the three supreme lyrical factors are “passion, pathos and grace”; that is exactly what you find in his version of that wonderful poem.

His translations from Heine and Goethe are incomparable, and to the difficulty of the task anyone will bear witness who recalls the immense richness of the language in the region of the emotions, the faint but desperately important shades that differentiate two words which according to a German-English dictionary mean exactly the same thing. Of such a difficulty I can give a tiny but pregnant example.

There is a passage in *Tasso* in which Goethe says it would be impossible to bear the intolerable cruelty of fate had not nature given us “den holden Leichtsinn.” For years one had vainly sought in books, and ransacked one’s brains to hit on, an adequate rendering in English of a bit of wisdom that no race stands more in need of than the Anglo-Saxon (unless perhaps the Scotch!). But unfortunately there is no exact equivalent in English for the German word “hold,” nor, in this particular sense, a satisfactory one for “Leichtsinn.” A conscientious student might hazard for “holden Leichtsinn”: “amiable levity,” which is literally correct, only one cannot conceive of poetry that would survive this “derangement of epitaphs!” Baring has solved the problem. By using the word “divine” for “hold,” he gives an ingratiating side glance in the direction of the gods whose business it is to “try us so sorely,” as Goethe puts it; after which *light-heartedness* can be mentioned without letting down the dignity of the poem. It is to be feared that only those who know German, and also in this case the context, can quite appreciate the wonderful tact that suggested his rendering of the passage, “divine frivolity.” Those two words are what the French call “une trouvaille,” and the choice of them what Germans qualify as “genial”—that is appertaining to genius. And so it is with all his translations from the German, to judge which the writer humbly claims a certain capacity.

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This new book of Baring's has appeared so recently, and has, I believe, been so sympathetically received, that there is no occasion to say much more about it, unless to point out what doubtless will have struck other people; that the author's commentaries are perhaps the most arresting part of the book, in that the fun, the wisdom, the stiletto-like penetrativeness of some of these apparently casual remarks throw you back straight into the heart of the novels, or rather of all his work. No doubt it is delightful to have such reflections presented, one after another, in portable form, attached to little bouquets from the immense garden of literature of which he is lord; flowers which he need not even stoop to gather, for they leap up ready plucked into his hand. Only let people who are eagerly poring over this anthology and do not know the rest of his work realise, that the whole of it hails from the same country.

Before turning to such letters as will appear at the end of this book (after which will come a Postscript), here are a few specimens of the commentaries, some of which may have been put in to placate Charon, the shadowy Custom House Official who started this book by asking the author whether he had anything to declare.

1. After several quotations from Pope's *Iliad* comes the following *Commentary*:

"Pope is an interesting example of how the whirligig of Time affects a very great reputation. Critics of his day, Dr. Johnson for instance, thought that Pope was a matchless poet and that hundreds of years would elapse before the world would see such another. Then came the romantic movement and in its first flush the romantic writers still admired Pope. Byron looked upon his work as something beyond his reach, and compared it to a Greek temple, thereby afterwards eliciting the scorn of Matthew Arnold. Then, as time went on, the Victorian critics looked down upon Pope; his work was thought to be an elegant

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effort in confectionery, a wedding cake. Then came the war, and the breaking of Victorian ideals, idols, and especially of the Victorian critics. Lytton Strachey and Edith Sitwell sang once more the praises of Pope, but no young man appeared who could bend his bow, nor emulate the art, the fire, and the sound of his golden couplets. They cannot even parody Pope. The heroic couplet is an instrument which no one of the present day can use. It is an instrument no one has played since Byron and Crabbe."

2. A fragment from Sophocles is thus translated:

Only the woman who knows the cares of wedlock by experience knows what I endure.

Commentary: "Any wife to any husband."

3. I often wondered whether Baring found or invented the magnificent patronymic "Roccapalumba," and in one of his commentaries is an anecdote which settles the question.

After various Proust quotations, he tells us that Proust declared all fiction to be the fruit of memory, only the memory must be unconscious. He then goes on to say that when he was writing *Car's Cradle* he wanted a name for the Italian prince who marries the heroine. Suddenly there came into his head a song sung by Corney Grain in one of the entertainments that used to be called "the German Reeds." It was a parody of a Neapolitan song, and was made up of the names of Italian railway stations, among which was that of a small station in Sicily, *Roccapalumba*. "I was twelve years old when I heard Corney Grain sing this song," says Baring, "and it was thirty-six years later that the name of this railway station, which up to then had remained dormant, came at the call and bidding of invention. It was just what I wanted."

4. Talking of style, and natural style, Baring quotes Pascal as saying:

"Quand on voit le style naturel, on est tout étonné et ravi; car on s'attendait de voir un auteur, et on trouve un homme."*

* This exactly fits Baring's own style.—E.S.

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5. On page 243 he gives a poem of Lermontov's, and makes a very Baringesque comment on his own translation:

"I have worked at this translation for years. This is the best I can do; but apart from being inadequate, it is not quite right."

6. Speaking of Ronsard, Baring remarks: "Malherbe considered he had annihilated this prince of poets. He forgot, however, the whirligig of Time." He then goes on to quote as his two favourite Ronsard lines:

"La Parque t'a tuée, et cendre tu reposes."

and

"Je te salue, heureuse et profitable mort!"

after which comes a striking commentary: "The first has the grace of a Greek epigram, the second is like the call of a silver trumpet."*

7. In connection with, and bearing out, a remark of Edmond de Goncourt's about "*le vrai bon théâtre*," Baring says (and here again is an example of the "sweet commonsense" that his friend Mrs. Cornish hailed in the boy Baring, whom many people then looked upon as a lunatic):

"I have always thought that all theories of what a good play is, or how a good play should be written, are futile. A good play is a play which, when acted upon the boards, makes an audience interested and pleased. A play that fails in this is a bad play."

8. A line from Tacitus is quoted:

The marines were distrusted.

Commentary: "Is this the origin of 'Tell it to the marines'?"

9. But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.

Commentary: "I discovered in some old dictionary that 'russet' in older country English meant grey as well as reddish. That accounts for Shakespeare calling jays russet-pated."†

* One thinks of the high D trumpets in Bach's music; only a man as musical as Baring would have made that remark.—E.S.

† Did Lord Grey of Fallodon know this, I wonder?—E.S.

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10. Baring tells us that some people have disputed the authenticity of that magnificent passage in the *Iliad* where Achilles' horse Zanthus warns him of his approaching end, on the grounds that there is no other example in Homer of a horse speaking. "But why should there be?" Baring asks. "No one except Achilles had a pair of immortal horses. And the gods during the course of the Trojan war did many things more strange and more difficult than to produce a talking horse." And he goes on to remark that there are other talking horses in literature. "In Grimm's story *The Goose Girl* there is a horse called Falada who not only talks, but talks after his head has been cut off, and in rhyme. There is also Anstey's *Talking Horse* whose name was Brutus, and who was ridden disastrously by Mr. Gustavus Pulvertoft."

11. Baring reminds us that when Boswell complained of having dined at a splendid table without hearing one sentence of conversation worthy to be remembered, Johnson remarked that "there is seldom any such conversation." Going on to comment on kindred matters, such as the fate of epigrams, which are remembered for a time, but which, if brilliant without being profound, soon come to resemble tarnished tinsel, Baring says:

"When Oscar Wilde's comedies are revived in modern times, the epigrams in them have mostly an air of faded tinsel, but the wit that is inherent in the situations, and which is, in fact, comedy in action, survives."*

12. Here is a passage that proves how tragic fact, if you get a large enough dose of it, tends to weigh down beautiful theory. After the Manchurian campaign Baring made certain remarks to which the present writer took violent exception because they seemed to glorify war. (See p. 31.) Since then he has been through the horrors of modern mechanical warfare; and now, after quoting Priam's noble and piteous appeal to Achilles to accept a ransom for Hector's body, the *Commentary* is as follows:

* This is one reason why I believe Gilbert and Sullivan to be immortal.—E.S.

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"In this interview, as told by Homer, Priam says all that can be said about the most tragic fact inherent in all wars; the irreparable wrong and the unending, incurable sorrow inflicted on one another by men, who, but for the accident of war—that one is on one side and one is on the other—would feel nothing for one another but affection and respect."

One cannot help thinking that the loss of many of his best beloved friends, and realising that almost everyone he knew was in the same case, brought about a saner view than that which is expressed in the Russian book.

13. Talking of Gray, Baring says that he was a great Dante scholar and lifted one of Dante's most beautiful lines into his *Elegy*. "There is no surer mark of a great poet," he adds, "than to be able to lift successfully. Just as the French say about witty sayings: 'On ne les prête qu'aux riches,' so is it only the very rich poets who steal from their fellow poets. The poor do not dare. The contrast would be too sharp between what they have written themselves and what they have borrowed."

14. To one perfect and solemn quotation no author's name is appended:

"Et à l'heure de ma mort soyez le refuge de mon âme étonnée, et recevez-la dans le sein de votre miséricorde."

This quotation, the last Baring gives us, shall conclude an attempt to give some faint idea of the charm of his last work.

LETTER SECTION II

LETTERS FROM M. B. TO ETHEL SMYTH (WITH COMMENTS)—
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN M. B. AND VERNON LEE—LETTERS
FROM T. E. SHAW (LAWRENCE OF ARABIA) TO M. B.—LETTER FROM
G. BERNARD SHAW TO ETHEL SMYTH

NOTE BY E. S.

IN this second Letter Section there is no elucidating Memoir to fall back on, *The Puppet Show of Memory* having stopped at the outbreak of the war. Therefore, lest the reader should lose connection between Baring's letters and himself, explanatory remarks will be interpolated here and there, especially where the other side of the correspondence is not given.

After the war Baring's tent was set up successively in various places; among them at Pickwick's Villa, Dulwich Village; at rooms he had mentally earmarked for himself long ago, 3 Gray's Inn Square, and finally at Rottingdean.

This much to throw light on headings, most of which, after having been given once in full, will be truncated.

LETTERS FROM M. B. TO ETHEL SMYTH
(with comments)

B. E. F., France.

October 25, 1914.

. . . When the troops arrived, singing "It's a long long way to Tipperary," at Maubeuge, after forced marches in the dark, it was one of the most tremendous moments I have ever experienced. *The most tremendous.* They swung up—or the tune swung them up—a very steep hill over the ringing pavement, and the French came out of their houses and threw flowers and fruit at them and gave them cigarettes; and they looked so young, so elastic, and so invincibly cheerful, so unmingledly English, so

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tired and so fresh. And the thought of these people swinging on into horror undreamt of—the whole German Army—came to me like the stab of a sword, and I had to go and hide in a shop for the people not to see the tears rolling down my cheeks. I couldn't let my mind dwell on it for days after without the gulp in my throat coming back.

I went to Mass this morning, and it was nice to think I was listening to the same words, said in the same way with the same gestures, that Henry V and his "contemptible little army" heard before and after Agincourt, and I stood between a man in khaki and a French Tommy, and history flashed past like a jewelled dream. . . .

B. E. F., *France*.

June 16, 1916.

The last two times I went through Germany I didn't dare go to Hildesheim,* as I thought the catastrophe so near that it might happen any moment although I didn't see it coming. I believed in the thunderclouds which I didn't see. And I felt I couldn't go and talk there. . . .

France.

September 20, 1916.

. . . Life is a strain now isn't it; scaffolding falls about one daily, one's old friends, one's new friends are killed or disappear like flies; the floor of life seems to have gone, and one seems to live in a permanent eclipse and a *seasonless* world—a world with no summer or winter, only a long grey neutral-tinted rainy chill Limbo. Raymond Asquith is the latest. I was certain he would be killed. I dined with him the night before he went back to his regiment after a spell at GHQ—I felt I would never see him again. I think he deserved his glorious fate, and deserved it doubly or trebly from not being a soldier, and by having so much to give; one can't say more. . . . He was the wittiest man I have ever known; his wit was like a shining icicle, and it was the wit that receives as well as the wit that gives. . . .

October 8, 1916.

. . . I have just seen in *The Times* that Mrs. Cornish's second boy Gerald was killed the other day. He was a very lovable person and I admired him immensely. Once he went to a meeting

* He had studied German at Hildesheim and was much attached to the family he had lived with.

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which was strongly antisuffragist . . . I don't know what the meeting was about . . . but he knew its temper and he yelled *Voies for Women* at the top of his voice . . . he was a deeply convinced suffragist and he was hurled out and very badly hurt. He knew this was going to happen and was quite white before. I think this is one of the bravest things you can do. . . .

P.S.—If the “Russian people” gave you any *idea*, it justified its existence, but when it was finished and in print I saw how it ought to have been. I suppose it's always like that—and then one thinks next time one will do it better, and next time is just as bad in a different way, because *on arrive novice à tous les âges*. (La Rochefoucauld—oh! how true!) After the war was over (Manchuria) I saw what *I could* have written. In the Turkish war I was shut out from all material and it was simply bricks without straw. But if in one's failure something hits, one ought to be pleased. I have had another great bout of writing.

*Pickwick's Villa,
Dulwich Village,
October 24, 1919.*

. . . Then I want to say, lest I forget, that once in your life you gave proof with regard to me of *miraculous* intuition: you told me one day when we were bicycling somewhere near One Oak (it must have been about 1900) that you felt I would become a Catholic some day. At that moment I felt, though *je ne demandais pas mieux*, that nothing was more impossible. . . .

*Beefsteak Club.
December 16, 1919.*

. . . Elizabeth is in a flame of enthusiasm about *Mount Music*.* She says she sees the whole of the life she knows so well accurately reproduced. Edith is a great artist besides being *une âme noble*. . . .

June 7, 1920.
. . . Two men walked out of the Queen's Hall in front of me. One of them said: “Have you heard Ethel Smyth's . . .” and then I couldn't catch. The man proceeded to say he thought it was one of the most beautiful things he had ever heard. Has something of yours been done lately, if so where? . . .

* Novel by E. OE. Somerville and Martin Ross.

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Dulwich.

July 2, 1921.

. . . Let us be thankful, dearest E, they haven't written nonsense about your books. Do you know this about *Racine* by Anatole France? I will type it so that you can read it:

"Il était las; il ressentait cette amertume, ce grand mal de coeur, ce dégoût des choses qui vient aux meilleurs, à ceux qui travaillent avec le plus d'amour. Les hommes qui firent les oeuvres les moins vaines sont ceux qui virent le mieux la vanité de toutes choses. Il faut payer par la tristesse, par la désolation, l'orgueil d'avoir pensé."

I am sure George Moore must have felt like this sometimes, often; and I well understand his withdrawing his books from the usual ruck of publication. . . . It has taken people in England about thirty years to find out that he is one of the greatest masters of the English language there have ever been. Perhaps this is not to be wondered at, but one would have thought they might at least have found out sooner that he was an exquisitely cunning and divinely efficient story-teller.

But still he need not worry now. All the people whose opinion he would care for, young and old, recognise what he has done in the battle of letters, and for the service of art, and they say with one voice, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. . . ."

Beaufort Castle, N.B.

August 15, 1921.

. . . *Passing By* has at any rate the quality of provoking the most widely different impressions, and as long as it interests, nothing else matters. Here are some of the *obiter dicta* either written to me, said, or repeated to me:

"If it's a tract, it's a very good one." (*A Russian.*)

"A book that ought to be put on the Index. No one could join a religious communion in which such an awful thing as Mrs. Housman becoming a Nun would be allowed." (*A Farmer.*)

"Neither interesting, nor amusing, nor edifying." (*A Lady.*)

"If it's propaganda, it's bad propaganda, because the other side is so clearly and forcibly stated." (*An Author.*)

"You have invented a new art form in which the two protagonists observe an unbroken silence. Godfrey Mellor is at present my favourite character in fiction." (*A Civil Servant.*)

"It demands a good deal in the way of inference and imagina-

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tion; on the other hand it gives a sense of vivid reality. Housman, Solway, and the writer are very lifelike; Mrs. Housman and Ayton not quite so clear, tho' I feel Mrs. H.'s charm. (*A Don.*)

"One can't understand till one becomes a Catholic how easy it is to accept what the Catholic Church teaches, and how impossible it is to become a Catholic if one first wishes to convince oneself that all the Church teaches is true or even probable. Godfrey Mellor is an excellent sketch of a very English character, unbiassed by intellectual opinions and very fair-minded." (*A Scholar.*)

"I am not an educated person; life spent among the lower middle-class, and then a fitter in factories. I like your novel immensely and the R.C. bits are very interesting. I like the way Godfrey develops." (*A Fitter.*)

"... A woman like Mrs. H. would never have thought of running away." (*An American Lady Novelist.*)

"... Of course she was bored to death with A. and devoted to Housman." (*A very rich man.*)

Beaufort Castle.

September 2, 1922.

... Mrs. Cornish died at the beginning of August. She had a short illness (heart) and it only lasted about a fortnight. During the first week of it she continued to be passionately interested in life and re-read *Middlemarch*; and then, when she realised that she was dying, she became still more passionately absorbed in what is beyond life; so it was the happy end of a very full and breathlessly occupied life; a happy life shot with Sorrow and Tragedies but rich in "vast consolations." ("I have poured into them vast consolations," Thomas à Kempis. Ch. LVIII, 3 (6).)

Bless you, M. B.

Beaufort Castle.

September 6, 1922.

BELoved E.,—

I have finished the *Impressions* once more. My impressions of them are still richer and fuller than they were before. How thankful I am you wrote that book. I bless Aksakov—for it was Aksakov, wasn't it, that lit the spark?

... After many wet weeks the summer has suddenly arrived and the night before last was a *feenhafte** night. Light, although

* Fairlylike.

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dark; the air intoxicating with aromatic clouds from the high lime trees; and the feeling of magic abroad; sounds of dancing coming from the distance; stamping and rhythmic shouts and the music of pipes that seemed close enough to touch, and as far away as faeryland. . . .

Beaufort Castle.

September 22, 1922.

. . . I went to the Inverness meeting. I have never known what *rhythm* meant till I heard Mrs. Logan play the Highland reels, conducting a whole orchestra and a whole ballroom by her playing. Deadly rhythm. The whole room leaping and stamping to it (she can't play a valse at all, or anything else). . . .

St. James's, S.W.

(On the death of Madame Bulteau.)

November 10, 1922.

. . . I found this sentence in a book about O. Henry yesterday. He said to a friend: "Sometimes things look so black to me I don't see much use in anything. *I can't bet on myself.*" Mme. Bulteau made one bet on oneself. It is a cruel, unique loss.

(The following four letters, written after a concert I gave, will give an idea of what such appreciation meant to one who was not a favourite either with the Powers that Be or the Press.)

*3, Gray's Inn Square,
W.C.1.*

November 21, 1923.

. . . I was so sorry to miss you. Laura had to go and see her father and only just managed to stay till the end of the songs, and I had to go somewhere else. She enjoyed it all so immensely, and I was struck by the difference of her response and that of others.

What I liked in the Violin Sonata was the extraordinary *Schwung* and youthful spirit in it . . . as full of spirit as the month of May. I should love to hear it again. I agree about your work being all on one level in quality and dimension, but I don't think that it at all follows, that when this happens, the person who will like the work of the artist in question will like it *all* . . . all or none. One imagines this *must* be so, but I am convinced that is an illusion. *Sub specie aeternitatis*. I suppose the work of any one of us is the same throughout . . . has the same qualities even in its worst faults, and the same fault even in its greatest

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qualities; but when the work is faced by Jones and Smith, then the factors of *Smith* and *Jones* are brought into play, and to *them* it seems made up of various and different elements. One responds to this chord and not to that; one has gaps.

Among your songs I imagine, and I *feel*, that *Odelette* is just the same in quality as the others; it may be best, and yet I do not respond to it in the same way as I do to the others. There is a gap in me which prevents my "getting" it. . . .

November 22, 1923.

Nathalie was at the concert too with Cecilia Fisher, Mrs. Cornish's daughter. They were incensed at the singing which they thought monstrously inadequate. Nathalie said a nice thing about Fleury,* that he comes in with such an exactly right unobtrusiveness that you don't notice that he hasn't been there all the time. In all the range of music I know nothing more beautiful than the unexpectedness of the phrase: "*Tu es lasse, et ta danse m'attend incertaine*"; it has the unexpectedness of the return of a friend who is far away suddenly opening the door and walking in, and although no one was so little expected, nothing seems more natural . . . nobody was *more* expected.

When Duse acted *The Lady from the Sea*, and the sailor who has haunted her life with a shadow of *terror*, and who she believes to be at the end of the world, actually arrives and is there, she said: "Ecco-ti" with a voice and accent that conveyed that in spite of a life-long fear she had been expecting him, and that his impossible unexpected arrival was really quite natural—what she had been in reality expecting every moment of her life.

Another of the great sharp stabs of beauty is to my mind "Arme plutôt l'Amour."

. . . I have been reading Goethe and a lot about him. What a martyr he was to Hell's delights.†

November 24, 1923.

. . . Another place in music where one experiences, to my mind, the divine unexpected long-expected surprise, is the phrase in Schubert's *Prometheus*:

* A flautist.

† A family expression for tiresome duties, social or otherwise.

MAURICE BARING

“Wähntest du etwa
Ich sollte das Leben hassen,
In Wüsten fliehen,
Weil nicht alle
Blüthenträume reiften?”

In that, in your “*Tu es lasse, et ta danse m’attend incertaine*,” and in one or two other things, I have personally reached the high-water line, the supreme fulfilment and crown of my musical experience and enjoyment.

This is only a postscript.

Yrs. M. B.

White’s,

November 27, 1923.

. . . I didn’t mean to *blame* Goethe for being a prey to Hell’s Delights; I only meant to *constater* my own ignorance of the fact. Since nibbling at his work during these last ten days I have had one of those startling illuminations about it—purely personal, and possibly wrong, but as clear and vivid as when a copy-book platitude leaps into letters of fire. Too long to write about it, but I shall. *Tasso* seems to me to tell the story of all *artists*, and a great many other things too. He tells your story, and my story, and Belloc’s story, and the story of anyone who has had to reconcile X with Y, who has *seen* X, and had to cope with Y. If you re-read it you will see what I mean. How comforting it is to think he was often wrong about political events—*near* events—and yet often right *while* wrong.

I sent you Belloc’s verse. His verse seems to me in the same situation as your music, in some ways, in relation to contemporaries; it is *of the stuff that will endure*. . . .

NOTE BY E. S.

There are no letters of 1924 to reproduce, but Baring usually spent part of every autumn in Scotland at Lord Lovat’s (Beaufort Castle) and Lady Lovat kindly sends me the following record of his activities.

Lady Lovat, who does not profess to be “good at machinery,” began learning in that year to drive a car, and with great difficulty obtained a driving licence, dated from August 6th, 1924, till August 5th, 1925. She left it for two minutes on her writing

LETTER SECTION II

table, and, coming back, found that the space left for "endorsements and collisions, if any," had been filled in by Baring as follows:

- August 1st: collision with train.
- August 2nd: collision with motor-cycle.
- August 3rd: collision with donkey-cart.
- August 4th: collision with perambulator.
- August 5th: collision with goods train.
- August 6th: licence withdrawn.

With infinite trouble and after paying a heavy fine, Lady Lovat procured a second licence which ran from August 10th, 1925, to August 9th, 1926. But again her guest got hold of it, and the incriminating space was thus filled up:

- August 27th: collision with bicycle.
- August 28th: collision with hand-tricycle.
- August 29th: collision with motor-scooter.
- August 30th: collision with charabanc.
- August 31st: collision with go-cart.
- September 1st: licence withdrawn.

LETTERS FROM M. BARING RESUMED

3, *Gray's Inn Square*.

May 11, 1925.

. . . Malta was entrancing, the manoeuvres thrilling, and then Rome for Holy Week, the services in St. Peter's, the careless Music, the choir sprawling over the notes like Lucca della Robbia figures . . . the wonderful wail at *Tenebrae*. I stood for three hours two afternoons with a sprained ankle in a dense crowd, and it went by like a flash; and the washing of the Altar on Maundy Thursday, and, best of all, the gradual coming to life of the Church on Saturday morning, candle by candle, flower by flower, the first curling whiff of incense and then, at the first words of the *Gloria*, all the bells of Rome ringing after the forty hours' silence . . . I saw *Maria*,* and we talked of you. I saw a lot of amazing things.

I thought of you most at Malta at the opera, a real Italian opera with people chattering in the boxes and singing *the Barbiers*—

* Countess Pasolini.

MAURICE BARING

all out—and acting it as only Italians can. And the singers were quite extraordinarily good. I would rather have an opera done there than anywhere; it has all the naturalness and spontaneity of the Old Vic with really good singers and orchestra.

. . . I send you, too, my *Collected Poems*. If H. B. had been alive I would have dedicated this book to him. . . .

White's.

July 29, 1925.

1. If one has anything to do with play-writing, play-acting, play-producing, public performance, one must make up one's mind either to bully or *be* bullied.

Sardou, Dumas, Gilbert, Shaw, Pinero bullied.

Chekov was bullied, and I think died of it.

The Goncourts *were* bullied, and, oddly enough, I believe D'Annunzio.

Shakespeare } Who knows?
Molière }

What I have found in my life hardest to bear is the *patronage* from theatrical managers, agents, critics. . . . "One day, you'll *write a play*." "I should like, when you write a play . . ." "Of course, you understand, it's *not a play*."*

Some weeks ago I went to a prize fight at the Albert Hall. How refreshing to see the British public face to face with *an art* (an art, mind you), and possibly genius that they *liked and understood*. There was the same warm, tense, embracing silence, the same sudden tremor and impressible ripple of appreciation, the same unchokable outburst of applause, face to face with a clever piece of footwork, an inspired punch, a subtle feint, a faultless piece of timing, as you find in a French theatre when an actor of genius is speaking Racine, or in a German concert hall, where a violinist in a quartet is phrasing as if the composer were whispering in his ear. . . .

3, Gray's Inn Square.

August 28, no 29, 1925.

. . . Do you know, Ethel, that typewriting is, I think, quite as difficult as reading at sight? . . .†

* Compare Letters from G. B. Shaw, pp. 149 and 340.

† A specimen of his typing is given on p. 326.

LETTER SECTION II

[The following letter tells the story of the funeral at sea of Baring's nephew, Lt.-Commander Cecil Spencer, commemorated later in one of the most beautiful memorial poems ever written. It is interesting to see how exactly that poem tallies with this account. Baring never embroiders.]

3, Gray's Inn Square.
April 3, 1928.

DEAREST ETHEL,—

I wonder where you are? Can you read this? Last time I wrote to you with a stylograph pen you said you couldn't read a word of my letter, and then you begged me not to type as you said that was worse. Having said all this I will now write with a quill.

I came back in H.M.S. *Nelson* from Gibraltar a few days ago. I have sat down pen in hand to write to you many times during the last months, but there was always too much to say. This is briefly what happened to me.

I went to Gibraltar in H.M.S. *Nelson*, sailing on January 10th. Reached Arrosa Bay January 13th. Stayed there till January 22nd. Went on board destroyer *Westminster* and proceeded to Gibraltar, arrived January 25th. Stayed there till February 1st, when an old friend of mine came on board, a man called Ellwood. He said "I have just come from England and I am going to Malta in the *Resolution*, why don't you come too?" I had no more thought of going to Malta than to the moon. Indeed I was by way of going to England. I said "Very well, I will if you can arrange it." It was arranged.

We arrived at Malta February 6th, passing the *Queen Elizabeth* at sea. I went ashore after luncheon. I went to the Club and walked about. About six o'clock one of the Maltese servants at the Club asked me if I had seen my nephew Cecil Spencer that day? I said "No, he's surely not on shore, because we passed his ship" (the *Queen Elizabeth*). "Oh," said the servant. "Haven't you heard? He's had a very bad accident riding. The doctor is here in the Club."

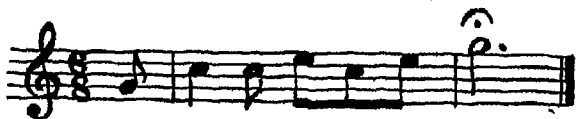
I went to see the doctor. The doctor said his pony had shied in a thunderstorm and dashed his head against a wall. There was practically no hope of his recovery. I went to see the C.-in-C. who was charming. The next morning I went to the hospital which is high up on a hill across the harbour and there I saw Cecil lying unconscious, sleeping.

MAURICE BARING

The next morning I got a message to say he showed signs of slight improvement. I went again and he recognised me at once, opening wide blue eyes and laughing, and with his usual delightful manners worried about my not having a chair. I went out at once thinking it must be very bad for him. That evening he was worse, and the next day weaker.

In the meantime his two sisters Lavinia and Margaret started from London by air. They were due on Friday morning; I went to the aerodrome to meet them, and it was reported that a machine had arrived at Syracuse. It was a lovely day and I waited there all day till it grew dark; wondering what had happened and saying all the conventional things one used to say in the war when one waited for machines which one knew would never come back. Nobody knows the ritual better than I do. The next morning news came, they had been delayed and were coming by seaplane. They landed at eleven.

On Sunday Cecil was said to be more conscious, on Monday weaker, and on Tuesday after a rally, a message came at 7.30 to go to the hospital at once. I went across in a little boat. All the lights were twinkling. It was blowing hard above but sheltered below. A ball was going on. I found Lavinia and Margaret waiting, and about nine the nurse came in and fetched us. We heard the Last Post, and then he died about ten minutes later, quite quietly and looking very beautiful. He was buried at sea on Thursday, in a beautiful spot between a high rock and a bleak headland. It was a lovely day. The whole of the ship's company were mustered over the huge guns in tiers. All the ship's work went on very swiftly but as if done by ghosts. The bugles saluting as we left the harbour seemed to "open arms,"



and when it was all over they played Schubert's *Marche Militaire*.

The next day I took the girls to Rome, and I stayed there. They went home with Delia.* I stayed in Rome till March 5th. Saw Eugénie Strong and Maria Pasolini, who said "Quando vedo gli Inglesi 'bask in the sun,' mi spaventono."† I went to see

* Another of Cecil Spencer's sisters.

† When I see English people "basking in the sun" it terrifies me!

LETTER SECTION II

H. B.'s tomb* and talked about him to the *gardien*. Stayed there till March 5th, then left for Naples; went by steamer to Malta arriving Wednesday March 7th. Went on board the *Queen Elizabeth* on Sunday night, sailed next morning, and arrived at Gibraltar March 16th; stayed there till 22nd and then home in the *Nelson*.

Yours, M. B.

White's.

November 28, 1928.

. . . I thought the Mass *overwhelming*, especially the Kyrie, the Sanctus and Benedictus—oh! all. I still don't understand why you put the *Gloria* at the end. It dislocates to me the unwritten shape of any Mass. Oh, Ethel, I thought it *great* and finely done. Never so well done as this time.

3, Gray's Inn Square.

January 12, 1929.

. . . I thought the *Menin Gate*† a very fine poem, indeed, I admire all his poems very much. I understand his expressing such sentiments, and sympathise with him and with them, and think they should be expressed; but I used to be highly irritated during the war and after it when other people, Vernon, for instance, talked in that vein about "murder," etc., because it seemed to me they talked as if men, and specially young men, would have been immortal had they not been killed in the war; and also as if there was no such thing as horrible death in peace time and in civilian life. Aber, aber! . . . I think death is just as terrible and horrible in peace as in war, and, in fact, in war has the slight advantage of there being at least an obvious reason for dying or getting killed; whereas in peace time and in ordinary life the reasons may be just as right but are often not at all obvious. . . .

NOTE BY E. S.

After the year 1929 very few of Baring's letters seem to have survived, and I think the following specimen of his art as typist may partly account for it.

* Harry Brewster, who was buried in the beautiful Protestant cemetery.

† Poem by Siegfried Sassoon.

MAURICE BARING

October 6 1953.

*Telephones
Nottingham
9164*

*Half Way House,
Hagyming Road,
Nottingham.*

Dearest E

but you shall have luncheon w th me at Ballestins.

near your publisher. I must go there to discuss Risotto.

I must find out what English people do o it to make it
wrong. I f^{er} the Andres are boyth going soon^d. She is going
to have a bby. a babay. shⁱ inot quite sure .

yet.

So that will be the end of all that. I bthink I hlllshut my
Lndon house qtovetyer. I am nver there.)



Vernon Lee at Sestri. 1914.
(Copyright Miss Margery Taylor.)

LETTER SECTION II

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN VERNON LEE AND M. B.

(The accompanying picture of Vernon Lee, taken at Sestri while travelling with her friends Mona and Margery Taylor, has a quality that is seldom found in the work of professionals. It appears that the sitter jestingly expressed gratification at finding herself portrayed as "a figure of romance"; and it is true that, never good-looking, in 1914 Vernon was not even young. But at heart she was "a figure of romance" and this is precisely what Miss Taylor has contrived to convey—likewise a view you cannot see, yet feel; in fact, Vernon in her true frame, Italy.)

*Il Palmerino,
San Gervasio,
Florence.*

(On Proust.)

December 9, 1919.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

Yes, indeed you shall have a letter from me, and I am greatly touched by your wanting one. I am not a faithful person like you (and indeed like most of my friends, bless them!) in the sense of past affection being sufficient to fill up the rifts (which grow with time and circumstances) made by opinions and abstract passions; and I feel that my fantastical susceptibilities have increased with age and with the War, to the extent . . . well! of having for instance utterly lost touch with you. But I want you to know that, by an odd compensation, when my friends drop me or I drop them, there remains in me a perfect fidelity to what they were to me in the past. I can't—it is some horrible unnaturalness in me—I cannot take people as—how express it? *wholes in time*. I should try and be civil to the *slipped pantaloons* (this is *not* an allusion to your dressing-gown, dear Maurice! it is a classical quotation) for the sake of the small boy with the satchel (I think he had a satchel?)—but I don't feel they are the same. I don't identify myself sufficiently with my own past to be able to identify others in this way; and my life has seen strange metamorphoses in others, making identification impossible. Perhaps for this reason, the past of my friends, at any given moment, remains as intact and as stable as does their portrait; and with that realisation of what they were, there goes (indeed it

MAURICE BARING

is perhaps all the same thing) the realisation of what they were to me. All this dreadful analysis (but I have turned psychological, as you perhaps know) means that, dear Maurice, I have the vividest impression of, the warmest affection for, the very dear friend you were all those years ago in Rome and elsewhere, when we played together, and when, as I then imagined, we also had the same ideas about things which weren't play. These things, as I have grown old, have got on the top of me, and I can't play any longer—I mean not *merely* play, or indeed play at all—except with quite indifferent people. And you aren't that. This explains why I have, quite consciously, allowed myself to drift apart from you. *But not from* my dear (possibly quite unreal, and possibly also the dearer) Maurice of the Roman days.

I daresay all this is inhuman; at all events believe me, it is not ungrateful or forgetful.

Thank you for your book.* Of course what amuses me most is the Vernon Lee. It *is* so exactly me. I, on the other hand, feel as if I could have done a Maurice Baring much in the style of Catullus and the Steamer at Naples. Don't you think critics are idiots to object to mannerisms? They are, after all, what critics know us by; it is *we* who ought to get bored with them. But then Providence is merciful, and few people get bored with themselves. Sargent gets bored with own mannerisms and is always trying to turn over new leaves, with the result of a worse mannerism on the next page. Henry James ditto, etc., etc., *ad lib*.

Which brings me to Marcel Proust. I read *Swann*† before the war; all the parts about the little boy, grand'mère, tantes, etc. delighted me; the ignominies of Swann and his corresponding(?) part really made me rather ill of depression. Jealousy is the most indecent of all exhibitions, as it nearly always implies return of the seasick dog to that particular basin. Swann does nothing but vomit and return . . . and I feel like groaning for the stewardess as I read it. I think this nauseousness is due to Proust's temperamental style (he is a relation of a great friend of mine and I am told a person of what Pierino Pasolini used to call a "vomitevole" kind himself). It is a style that ought (like any very marked one) to be counteracted by application to a subject having the *reverse* character, as a great performer counteracts the over-solemnity-

* *Round the World in Any Number of Days*, in which is an amusing (imaginary) page out of Vernon's Diary.

† *Du Côté de chez Swann*, by Proust.

LETTER SECTION II

quality of Handel, or the beau ténébreux (weeping willow) of a Beethoven Adagio, by picking up the tempo. Therefore the early part is delightful; but the later ("vomitivevole" jealousy part) brings out what I believe grammatical analysis would reveal—a certain insufficient motility and circulation, a sticky, sea-slug, slimy slowness temperamental to the man. I think redundancy is less often (as in V. Hugo) the result of lack of brakes on a very easily rolling cart, than of a lack of moving along—witness Swinburne, Wagner, d'Annunzio. These are the sensual temperaments, the people who go on sucking and sucking, rolling things in their mouth; lolling, trailing, and, when it comes to Proust, leaving a not very appetising trail behind them.

Of course he's a great writer. Those sort of sticky people often are. The brisk, fresh, energetic type is usually too energetic to put all energy into good art, worse luck. Art gets the *ténébreux*, the *ronflants*, the *Slimy Tones*, the people not quite good enough for life and finding life not good enough for them. (I am sure I am right! Upon my word, I'll write an essay on it!) Well, I have borrowed *Les Jeunes Filles en Fleurs* from Mme. Duclaux, and shall read it. But meanwhile am finishing that most enchanting of books (except the *Chartreuse*) *Rouge et Noir*. Stendhal! There's a man so brisk, so clean in perception and movement, so energetic, so full of breeze and sunshine, that he wrote only two—at most three—novels and spent his time at dozens of useless things.

Well, good-bye, dear Maurice, and believe in the affection of your friend *du temps jadis*.

VERNON.

*Dulwich Village,
September 21, 1920.*

MY DEAR VERNON,—

I have been listening to your talk and your voice this evening—(don't be alarmed: this is not *spiritisme*) by reading some of your old letters. This has given me a great longing to hear from you again; to see one's friends after a long absence is like the resurrection of the flesh, and if one can't see them, the next best thing is to hear from them.

. . . I hope you haven't quite forgotten your faithful and unchanging friend.

M.B.

MAURICE BARING

P.S.—Last year I wrote a long *drama* in rhyme, prose and verse, but I can't even get it published.* I have a public of three people; one is Ethel, one is an Irishman I hardly know, and one is Countess Benckendorff. You used to be a fourth. I would send it you if you cared to read it. It is printed privately. . . .

Florence.

November 25, 1924.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

I am now sitting on my balcony drying my bath towels in the divinest sun, and the carpenter, or some other mysterious daemon, is producing mock earthquakes in trying whether doors will shut without banging; which of course they won't.

However I am determined to have my say at last, which is (damn the pen!) dear Maurice, that I have liked *C* immensely and *that it's exactly* what I've expected of you for years, and of course thought you'd never do for that very reason. To say I enjoyed it? No; all the part about Leila's awfully painful reading, though you have entirely avoided the ignominious side of the business which makes *Swann* such a sickening masterpiece, and *Othello* a thing one blushes to witness; (jealousy is surely the most ignominious, as cruelty is the most obscene, of subjects). But painful or not, I have felt the end of the book as the death of a friend, also in the sense of missing its company. I have no doubt a hundred faults can be, have been, found with it. But I generalise in my private experience, and hold that every good work of art disarms even the most justifiable criticism, because the satisfaction prevents one's noticing anything unsatisfactory; there is not room for two opposite results. (With *Swann* it is the other way; the dissatisfaction is mitigated by rather deliberate perception of the great merits.)

You have invented rather a new, and I *think* quite legitimate, category of novel: *the diary in the 3rd person*. For only *C* exists, and all his friends (especially Beatrice) are mere allusions, as they would be in a diary; even Leila is thoroughly realised only in the letters, which of course constitute part of the diary. But all this is to the advantage of the extraordinary intimacy of one's feeling for *C*, just as you can see the reverse in Romain Rolland; for all the personages are intensely alive except Christopher, who is a mere excuse for *them*. The Leila part is to me painful: I can't bear that

* *Manfroy Duke of Athens*.

LETTER SECTION II

exquisite boy being killed by such a creature. And, as a matter of realism, would he have died of her, as he evidently had no illusions, he *not* being an old roué like Swann? And would a good Catholic like Beatrice not have felt bound to "save him" from such "sin"? Beatrice is unintelligible to me, but perhaps my experience of R. Catholics has always been among old-fashioned people, who would consider *C* as damned for adultery. (Personally I think when a man takes advantage of a woman being ready to take him as a lover, he ought to be ready to yield his place to other ones.)

Anyhow, I have liked *C* very much. The earlier part, all his enthusiasm about literature, is enchanting, and the little dry style, which looks as if it weren't one at all, is quite right. . . .

Florence.

March 28, 1926.

. . . I don't find *Cat's Cradle* anything like as good as *C*. The first half of the Roman part seems scamped, only the more as it is so enormously long in body though empty in soul. It should, I think, have been a brief retrospect. And even the English part seems to me inordinately full of trifling detail without realisation of the chief figures. (The men are all interchangeable). But—but—but—you have somehow, and perhaps by this very thinness of texture, contrived to give an extraordinary essence of passion, rather like what music gives. These (in my eyes) poor, footling, paper puppets (I kept repeating to myself: "some with lives that came to nothing etc." of Galuppi) have the quality of Tristram or Guinevere or Francesca, and that is . . . well, it's *great*. Only don't rely on this again; return to the sufficient solidity of *C*.

Of course I *dislike* your people, personally. I dislike their mixture of footling uselessness and devouring passion (they have *time* for it, as they never do anything but go to parties) and I dislike their (and your) Catholic other worldliness: I abominate such making light of life and it's . . . well! *uniqueness*. Of course protestantism is in its way equally abominable with its "being saved," as in a very able *horrible* novel called *Mary Lee* I've just read. I kept repeating (perhaps misquoting!) the rest of that passage while reading *Cat's Cradle*—

"Some with lives that came to nothing; some with deeds as well undone,

Death came silently and took them *where they never see the sun*"

MAURICE BARING

and that ("no^x est perpetua una dormienda") ran into another quotation about "che dal sol s'allieta . . ." and the "*Tristi fummo*." But about such matters we shall never agree; and of course religious people like you, are, like Schiller's actor, really enjoying their posthumous glory *vorau*s. It makes you *jolly* as Chesterton would say. Well—I came to bless and I seem to be cursing! Above all—which is a most miraculous portent, pointing to sudden senility—I am wallowing in quotations! Forgive me dear Maurice. And let us meet this July when I shall be at Miss Sargent's. . . .

[The following are notes sent by Baring to Vernon on her letter of March 28th, 1926.—E.S.]

Brighton.

April 5, 1926.

" . . . They have nothing to do except go to parties."

This text would, I think, or could, I think, elicit an interesting discourse, talk, discussion—*obiter dicta*. Here are a few points for your consideration—suggestions for *pages*.

x. Is it not possible that in *les classes aisées* (to which you and I belong, dear Vernon; let us never forget that!) there is only *one* difference, *one gulf* in material conditions that really vitally matters; and that is not, as the muddle-headed so often say, the gulf between he who has £800 a year and £5,000,000,000 a year, but the gulf between *precarious living*—the possible daily *nothing*—and *something*?

Between your and my manner of life and that of a Rothschild there is only a small difference of degree; but between my charwoman's manner of life, and yours and mine, there is an *infinite gulf*, because hers is *precarious*. Well, is it not possible, I say, that *les classes aisées* are not more innocently employed going to parties than working on committees, "preventing the poor," doing things with charity associations that have terrible results? cf. Renan and the Races (which I quoted to you in 1908).*

Point 2. *It is surprising how much time* is taken up by parties in the lives of Busy Men. Henry James puts on record 244 dinner parties in one year! Robert Browning, between 1870 and 1880,

* The reference is to a remark of Renan's (quoted on p. 200) that classes are interdependent; that he could not be sitting quietly in his study writing, were not thousands of people going that day to the races at Auteuil.

LETTER SECTION II

would have beaten that I think. *Arthur Balfour*, now nearly eighty, would NOW beat them all! You yourself have *been to many parties* in Rome, London, Paris, etc.

Point 3. Nothing seems to stop parties; neither death, earthquake, war, air-raids, revolutions, nor the plague: cf. Decameron, London Plague, French Revolution, Russian Revolution, the War.

[*Explanation?* The unconquerable gregariousness of man?]

Point 4. When the reviewers of High- (and Low-) Brow newspapers say, as they did and do, about my puppets: "They do nothing but go to parties"—their indignation is, I think, not against parties *qua* party, but against parties in Mayfair and Belgravia etc. They have nothing to say against people who go to parties in Bloomsbury or Chelsea. But when they profess to be shocked by the kind of parties I remember in my childhood, of which what is described in *Cat's Cradle* is a pale reflex—parties at my father's, or Mrs. P. Wyndham's, or Leighton's, where a small group of (at least) decently clothed, and (at least) *civilly mannered* people listened to music made by Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert and Rossini, played by Joachim, Madame Schumann, Mme. Neruda, Ries, and Piatti, or sung by Santley and Trebelli—and when I compare this to parties I have seen given by the modern "intelligentsia" in Bloomsbury and Chelsea where . . . well, the tone is different, and sometimes (to the unmarried!) *à faire rougir des singes*, I find these objectors comic.

And here, Vernon Lee, writer of Essays, is a subject made to your hand!

M.

Florence.

June 17, 1928.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

Your new book has come;* I am leaving it behind, because I've only yesterday finished *Susieki*,† and am leaving to-night for Zurich—to consult an aurist. Then, when he's done with or for

* *Comfortless Memory*.

† *Susieki* is the name of the country estate in Russia bought by the hero of *Tinker's Leave*, which is the book referred to.

MAURICE BARING

me, to London, where I shall be at Miss Sargent's and hope to see you. Dear Maurice, *Susieki* is exactly the book I have long been wanting you to write; the whole subject of Russia seems to suit exactly your *strange, rather musical than literary, talent*: those queer, slight people—slight and unreal like a melody and like a melody going to one's heart. We have many of us felt a place as a symbol of everything and your Heimweh for *Susieki* is ours. It is like certain sudden brief Mozart closes (cf. Sonata for Pftc: Andante, C dur). Of course your everlasting theology is a bore for me. (Is it a vow? so much theology for every glass of vodka?) But perhaps it's that enables you to go to one's heart.

Well—au revoir in July.

Yours VERNON.

Ringwood.

August 9, 1928.

. . . I saw your new book* being read in the train by quite a pretty long-legged girl. I, who am neither, will read it this winter. Meanwhile I am

Yours always,
VERNON.

Florence.

December 12, 1932.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

You will have guessed, I hope, that I wrote before having opened your new book,† merely to thank you for the gift, and without guessing the additional gift it contained in your reference to *Ariadne*. I am very grateful. The more so that it happens that I like this new book of yours very much, more than any of your longer novels, and that I am therefore the better pleased at that theme of mine having been worked into your counterpoint. (Such bits of unexpected counterpoint—the sort of thing in some of Mozart's quartets—always have a peculiar charm; the play within the play, the riddle in the riddle, a quadruple arabesque.)

You have also raised a question which is all the more interesting that some Italian amateurs have just reverted to a recurrent (I think hopeless) project of giving *Ariadne* in Boboli,

* *Comfortless Memory*.

† *Friday's Business*.

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and making poor Diego drown in the big pond.* *They* will be asking me, as Ben Webster did in Lady Lytton's rehearsals, whether the Duke did or did not recognise Diego. And I had to answer that it was for him to tell *me*, because *I* didn't know. . . . You know, I think, how utterly lacking I am on the dramatic side, congenitally uninterested in acting and the theatre, in fact rather disliking it. So far as I can imagine caring for this form of art (to which I am deaf), I of course agree with your French diplomat that (as in every other art) the real work is subjective, and a convergence of author and audience. (I am writing in bed and without your book, which expresses my idea so very much better than can my nowadays cloudy brain.) Also that what the author intended is neither here nor there.

In this case I really think the author, V.L., intended just nothing; I was at that time much impressed by the "terrible doubt of appearance," i.e. the way we are chilled and isolated by the impossibility of knowing what our nearest and dearest really mean and really *are*; also I think I like the vagueness better than the realistic possibility: *Alles Vergängliche* etc.† But of course the actor (and that's one reason why acting seems a slight profanation) has to bring down the *Gleichnis*, the contemplated abstraction, to a real, narrow, mean, human possibility—and I see that in reality the Duke was probably giving Magdalen her dismissal with a nice certificate. In fact your book has suggested to me that on the plane of reality (which is *not* that of literature!) Diego may have drawn down such an answer by questions which might seem indiscreet "fishing!" . . . horrible thought! !

Well, well, dear Maurice, and since people are pestering me for biography ("*Impressions which Remained*," in E. S.'s elegant words) which of course I shall never give except as incidental *Wahrheit und Dichtung*,‡ let me put on record (for it is a pleasure) that it was your Aunt§ who encouraged me to print *Ariadne*, about which, (as it was so unlike all my other work and also written with somnambulistic facility) I was in great doubts. *She* and Ethel. When I read it to them at Ascot I noticed your Aunt thought it was going to be a bore over "Renaissance"—and Madame

* This project did come off and made a deep impression. Too deaf to hear, Vernon followed the performance with a printed copy in her hand.—E.S.

† "All reality is but a symbol."—Goethe.

‡ *Truth and Fiction* (Goethe's Memoirs).

§ Lady Ponsonby.

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Duclaux also had thought it rather a bore—and (Oh, this will amuse you!) 1^o. Kit Thomson, when I asked her whether it was prose or blank verse, answered slowly: "Well, it isn't like *King Lear*;" 2^{do}. an actress (regnante Victoria) Elizabeth Robins, shook her head and said: "One can *be* a harlot all right, but it won't do to use the word——"

Well, dear Maurice, may these biographical items make up for the dullness of my letter, which was to thank you for your endless partiality, and to tell you how very much I've liked "Patrick" and "Eurydice." And to say bless you.

Palmerino.

October 9, 1934.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

I am unwell and writing even a card takes an effort, but I want to thank you for your undeserved faithful thought for me. And say that your book has come just as I was longing for something new to read.* The mere title is a marvel (*Mariana in the Moated Grange*!) and the bony, dry style a blessing after so much lusciousness—(sleepy pears with wasps hidden in them!) I was in London only three days and unable to see anyone. . . .

Florence.

December 1, 1934.

MY DEAR MAURICE,—

I *am*—in the sincerest, completest manner—most awfully grateful for your new gift,† let alone its having arrived just when I am fagged and stupefied by one of my little heart attacks, which make most things disagreeable. But there I sit by the fire with your omnibus volume on my desk, and go on reading, reading, reading delightedly, although at the end of every chapter saying to myself: "No, really no more just at present," and then go on turning and turning . . . just to see whether I recollect that particular *Dead Letter* or *Lost Diary*—Ysult, or the beloved Tiberius with his Wind Flower; or to find out what you have made of the subject of one of the *Diminutive Dramas*, for I have never had them at all.

But you know, even if I hadn't declared it in print, my admiration for these wonderful little things of yours, and how my

* *The Lonely Lady of Dulwich.*

† *Unreliable History.*

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ambition has been to do something "like Maurice." These are the sort of thing which makes me happy! As I am made happy by the *Princesse de Babylon* or some essay of Lamb or Hazlitt.

I am more than usually (even!) stupefied to-day, and further incapacitated by just hearing that my two poor servants had just lost their *Babbo*; that I must send them this afternoon a long drive into the mountains above Fiesole; that my dear old maid is unable to get up; that the laundress on whom I depend on charing occasions has influenza; and I must manage with the son of the house, an eighteen year-old electrician for my dinner etc., etc. So I can't even gather my thoughts and send you a list of what I like best—and is there a *best* in question when *all* is *very best*? I can only stick a stamp (*such* a monumental fascist stamp, with a heroic group and illegible numerals!) on this tiresome letter and say, dear, incomparable, Unreliable Historian, thanks, thanks, thanks, thanks, THANKS from

Your affec.

VERNON.

It was rather funny; I had a birthday just now, and was covered with flowers like a prima donna from people who have never before left so much as a card. It turned out that the report had spread that I am 80! It was a sort of Chapelle Ardente. But I'm only 78, which is surely ever so much less!

(*Vernon Lee died two months after writing this letter, in February, 1935.*)

E.S.

LETTERS FROM T. E. SHAW (LAWRENCE OF ARABIA) TO M. B.

*Miranshab Fort,
Waziristan, 30.x.28.*

DEAR M. B.,—

Your Augustan book and letter and the Spencer poem came to-day: we were very busy, contemplating a raid. So I put them aside. Now it is nearly nine in the evening and I am waiting to go on guard. I had an empty half hour and I read the Lord Lucas poem again; and the last few minutes of my time must write these lines to you.

MAURICE BARING

As you say, a man doesn't know what he has done in this job of writing: nor do I ever surely know what another man has done: but nearly sure, I do feel, sometimes: and I think that if ever a death-poem has been good it is yours. It takes me, each time I read it (even years after, as now, for I haven't seen it, certainly, since 1922 when I enlisted) absolutely by the throat. It is a lovely thing: and big, ever so big: and so simply sincere, and grievous, and splendid. I think Lucas will live, thanks to you, for as long as your language.

I stopped at the end of it, for I was quite full, and there would have been waste only in going on. Later I will read more, and see what I recognise and what I like. But there can't be any more upon the key and scale of the Lucas poem: people do not do their supremest more than once in life. Lucky if they do it once. I envy you the perfect welding of art, and feeling, and expression, and nobility of thought.

Damn it all, what a slow and clumsy way of saying that you have lifted me right out of myself in happiness. It is a wonderful thing: makes me shiver.

Yours,
T. E. S.

18.xii.28.

. . . You have a gift—the great gift—of just putting out your finger, effortlessly, to touch us in the heart.

Your poem on Lieut. Spencer is ever so queer; quite half its lines are plain prose, and the whole of it is poetry. Of course I know that bricks, bricks, bricks, build a house; and words, words, words make a poem. You, somehow, make prose upon prose become definitely poetic—and there's the touch of intimacy, given by this everyday language and half-slang phrase, which gets to its target (the heart, as I said above) more truly than grand words could do.

Your exquisite ear for the syllables of grief . . .

"I do not need you changed, dissolved in air
Nor rarefied,
I need you all imperfect as you were" . . .

But there's no need for me to quote your verses at you. The judgment that can choose these melting vowels knows better

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than the rest of us how seldom they have been as surely achieved.

There isn't much of it under the hat, I expect. One, two, or three perfect things (the Lord Lucas first of them all): but how good it is to be perfect in one's way. Your novels interested me, held me, pleased me: but those bits of poetry double me up and carry me away. Only by spending such pains to write well could you have caught that melody which lies behind the wording of the poems.

T. E. S.

26.iv.29.

(*Extract from a letter acknowledging receipt of Collected Poems by M.B.*)

. . . Your *Collected Poems* came to me from Bain with *The Coat Without Seam*. The Coat represents your other manner: . . . The *Gaston* play is very fine; far better than *The Black Prince*, I think. Hotter. I have not read beyond it yet; there is not a great deal of time, here, for reading. I am half-way in the *Coat*, now . . .

T. E. S.

338171 T E Shaw,
R.A.F. Mount Batten,
Plymouth.
February 21, 1930.

(*From a letter thanking him for Selected Poems.*)

. . . The good thing about you is that you are a most ripe and sound self-critic. What you let pass your guard is always good stuff, and your selections of yourself are what they should be. I cannot tell you how comforting it will be to have the Lucas, the Spencer, and the R.A.F. poems all in one binding. They set each other off, and prove that the first was not a happy accident of emotion on your part, but a legitimate flowering of your poetry . . .

T. E. S.

MAURICE BARING

LETTER FROM G. BERNARD SHAW TO ETHEL SMYTH (CONCERNING M. B. AND HIS PLAYS)

As regards the acting plays it will have interested Baring's friends to learn in a former chapter that, according to Mr. G. Bernard Shaw, Baring has a natural gift for writing for the stage. And I am glad I plucked up courage to ask permission to quote his remarks, particularly those referring to what I have always held to be one of Baring's master-pieces, His Majesty's Embassy, since this request brought me the following delightful letter.

E. S.

4, Whitehall Court,
London, S.W.1.
February 16, 1937.

MY DEAR DAME ETHEL,—

Yes, of course: quote anything you like of mine.

I did not know that Maurice is ill. What is the matter with him?

His biography was unique as a record of a happy childhood. He was delighted with everything that happened to him. Being sent to school and coming home for the holidays and going back again were all alike to him; they were treats to be looked forward to with excited ecstasy. He completely upset my belief that happiness is thrown away on children because they are incapable of it.

The letter about *The Grey Stocking* is not the only one I wrote to him, though it may be the only surviving one. I certainly urged him to change the conventional *coda* of his Russian play, in which the heroine committed suicide on discovering that the hero was a Tsarist spy. She should have said "So am I, dear," and fallen into his arms for a happy ending.

Maurice's comedies were supposed to be impossible on the stage because his embassy sets—his attachés and ambassadors and their tea parties—seemed so unnatural to playgoers educated at the St. James's Theatre by George Alexander and his authors. They were in fact exquisitely and deliciously like the real thing. How to cast them from our acting list with its Brighton-from-Friday-to-Tuesday notions of aristocratic manners was the difficulty. It was really a calamity that the theatre was incapable of him.

If only he had been able to shout about it as you did!!!

Always yours, dear Dame,

G. BERNARD SHAW.

POSTSCRIPT

Nor till this, the very last page of my study, was reached, did I realise with dismay that all this time I have forgotten to look up the origin of the dictum spoken of in the Preface, to the effect that only those who feel warmly towards an artist's work are in a position to judge it. I was certain the person who said this was Montaigne; but failing to find the place, and as time pressed, I asked that unique Friend and First-Aider of all distressed writers, Sir Edward Marsh, whether he could help me?

As usual, help was forthcoming. True, he was unable to "put his mind's finger" on the desired spot in Montaigne, but he did better, by placing *my* mind's finger on another notable spot. "I am very fond," he wrote, "of Pope's couplet about the patron:

'Who can your merit selfishly approve,
And show the *sense* of it without the *love*?'

which is on the same lines."

Now of course nobody can force himself to love what does not appeal to him. But opinions are not carved in marble, and people who are interested in Literature will do no harm by occasionally re-testing their angle to certain authors, and, with eyes fixed on the shelf where unloved books are stowed away, repeating to themselves Pope's couplet.

Meanwhile let me fall back on something said to me when I was quite a young girl by the great Wagner paladin, Hermann Levi.

That evening a terrific battle had raged between us, during which, all in expressing unbounded admiration for the great master's genius, I ceased not to urge that if his music did not go to the heart of heretics like myself as does that of Beethoven and Mozart, it surely was not our fault? And when, the battle over,

MAURICE BARING

the heavy *porte-cochère* was being wrestled with in the dark (for it was late), once more I rushed upstairs, poked my head in at his door and called out: "Please remember that I am *prostrate* before his genius!" After which I shut the door hastily and fled!

Next morning a post-card proved that this wonderful red-hot Wagnerian master, old and ill as he was, had torn down three pairs of stairs into the street, regardless of a real Munich snow-storm, to catch the midnight post. And on the post-card was written: "Never forget this. If a man's work is to be *really perceived at all* admiration is not enough. *You must love it!*"

I shall go on hunting for Montaigne's wording of this sentiment, but I do not fancy that he or anyone else could put better what, truth to tell, is the motto of this study. Some perhaps may not agree with the estimate herein expressed of Baring's significance in literature; but few I think can fail to recognise the rare quality of a mind that is both instantaneously responsive and stable; of a spirit which, without losing hold on lighter elements, is acquainted with the deepest sources of happiness and grief; and in one respect at least—its humility—is among the greatest of the great.

END

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Notes.—As a chronological list of Maurice Baring's works, with paged references, stands at the beginning of this volume, they will not be referred to in the Index.

Mutual friends, allusions to whom are frequent in the Letters, will only figure here in some special connection; and it will be the same with the names of modern poets, like Shelley, Swinburne, etc., of whom the correspondence is full.

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